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Aesthetic justice and communal theatre:  
a new conceptual approach to the community  
play as an aspect of theatre for empowerment

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## Summary

This study re-conceptualises the community play as an aspect of contemporary British theatre. In the context of the idea of an arts entitlement which has two components, participation and enjoyment, it examines three antecedents to current practice. These are: *theatre and empowerment*, which looks at the work of Brecht and Boal on conceptions of the audience; *outreach work*, which examines the de-mystification of art by looking at the relationship between theatre and education and *community arts*, which focuses on harnessing the creative potential of ordinary people. The lines of development which link these three areas to the community play are investigated. The history and origins of the form are outlined and Ann Jellicoe's work with the Colway Theatre Trust is examined.

The study offers a new conceptual vocabulary for the analysis of community playmaking which has three principal terms: *aesthetic materialism* - a development of Marxist principles as they relate to a consideration of the aesthetic circumstances of the people; *aesthetic justice* - an application of Beardsley's concept to contemporary society and current theatre practice; and *communal theatre* - a new term developed as a result of this study which clarifies the differences between participation and collaboration in the making of community theatre. These three concepts are united by their relationship to the rejection of bourgeois control of cultural capital which underpins the investigative stance of the study.

Contemporary society is characterised by the study as aesthetically unjust and the main questions it asks relate the search for aesthetic justice to the developing form of the community play. The theoretical investigations of the study are contextualized by fieldwork which consisted of a participant observation case study of the community department of the Belgrade theatre, Coventry. This spanned two years and focused on the 1992 Coventry community play Diamonds in the Dust.

The study concludes with a comparison of the main forms of participatory theatre in the 1990s which offers a means of identifying the heuristic value of the various models of community playmaking with respect to their potential for empowerment and contribution to aesthetic justice. The implications of the study are that the participatory element of the arts entitlement needs to be strengthened into true collaboration between the professionals and the non-professionals involved in order to ensure equality of access to, and popular control of, the cultural capital which is symbolised by the community play. Communal theatre projects of this sort are assessed as being able to promote the kind of shared experience which is necessary for the development of a more aesthetically just society.

**For Margaret, Sally and Mark**

# Introduction:

## The Poetics of Liberation

The *poetics of the oppressed* is essentially the poetics of liberation: the spectator no longer delegates power to the characters either to think or to act in his place. The spectator frees himself; he thinks and acts for himself. Theatre is action!  
Augusto Boal <sup>1</sup>

### The community play

This study aims to re-conceptualise the community play as an aspect of contemporary British theatre. It proposes the location of this form of practice in a new analysis of its theoretical, political and artistic context. This analysis is contextualised by a detailed case study of the work of the Belgrade theatre, Coventry as a means of evaluating and re-valuing aspects of community theatre activity between 1978<sup>2</sup> and 1996. The study is focused in Britain but, where they seem relevant, a number of significant international reference points have been plotted. The study argues that there are both antecedents to

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<sup>1</sup> Boal A *Theatre of the Oppressed* London: Pluto Press 1979: 155

current practice and lines of development which assist in the creation of new understandings of community theatre.

The community play is an important component of radical theatre practice which, hitherto, has not been adequately researched or theorised. This study looks at three key areas of antecedence and examines the lines of development which link these areas to the community play. The areas are:

- theatre and political concern
- theatre and educational concern
- theatre and social concern.

The existing literature in this field does not look in detail at the community play. For example, Kershaw (1992) gives an overview of radical theatre; Jackson (1980) and England (1990) contextualise theatre in education; Kelly (1984)<sup>2</sup> and Rothwell (1992) examine community arts. Outreach work, the arts centre movement and education in the arts are all well documented but the literature of the community play is largely confined to Jellicoe (1986) which is essentially a production manual for the Colway Theatre Trust model of community play production. Other writing on the subject usually uses Jellicoe's model as a basis (Holderness 1992; Open Theatre 1994). During the late 1980s the Colway Theatre Trust approach was adopted as the standard model for most community plays but as the number of projects increased so, too, did a measure of disquiet about how to quantify and control these events.

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<sup>2</sup> The year of production of Ann Jellicoe's first community play.



The once innovative form of theatre is now seen by many as a large and rather messy pseudo-community affair that involves a few jobbing professionals; an event that is basically self-congratulatory. A popular and democratic form of art is now seen as excluding many people from participating in its processes.  
(Open Theatre 1994: 3)

The community play has been chosen because can, at its best, fulfil the principles of cultural democracy and the aims of community theatre. The study argues that this work is not adequately described either by the term community theatre or by the concept of cultural democracy: it therefore offers a new conceptual vocabulary for analysing the community play. This conceptual vocabulary has three principal terms:

- aesthetic <sup>3</sup> materialism - a development of Marxist principles as they may be applied to considerations of the aesthetic circumstances of the people. This concept offers a way of analysing the relationship of classes in society to the means of cultural production.
- aesthetic justice - an idea formulated by Beardsley (Beardsley 1973) in connection with educational policy which this study develops and applies to current theatre practice. This concept offers a means of assessing the level of access of classes in society to objects and activities which have aesthetic value - in this case the cultural goods associated with community playmaking.

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<sup>3</sup> It is recognised that there are clear differences between the terms 'aesthetic' and 'artistic'. The work of Best, amongst others, has detailed this - see Best 1985: 153-168. However, to a certain extent the term 'aesthetic' is used in this study to denote an overarching philosophy and may be taken to operate as a synonym for the term 'artistic' in certain circumstances.

- communal theatre - a new concept which has been developed through this study. It offers a means of clarifying the differences between participation and collaboration in the making of community theatre. I will argue that where community theatre is participatory, community plays which extend this participation and promote aesthetic justice by using *collaborative* methods are making theatre *communally*.

## Aesthetic materialism

Marx articulated the idea of the proletariat as a unified class rather than as a disparate group and the study seeks to use that analysis as part of the argument for the development of the concept of aesthetic materialism.

Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses ... this distinctive feature: it has simplified the class antagonisms. Society as a whole is, more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat.<sup>4</sup>

(Marx & Engels 1967: 80)

Marx's two-class analysis of social stratification operates within this study as an emblem. Despite numerous revisions and reversals since 1848<sup>5</sup> and the widespread international retrenchment of Communism into Nationalism since 1989, the two-class analogy is used to symbolise the ownership of the means of *cultural* production, distribution and exchange by the bourgeoisie. This is developed into a critique of arts funding which is seen to be the aesthetic

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<sup>4</sup> This distinction is clarified as follows by Engels in a note to the English edition of 1888:

By bourgeoisie is meant the class of modern Capitalists, owners of the means of social production and employers of wage labour. By proletariat, the class of modern wage labourers who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labour power in order to live.  
(Marx & Engels 1967: 79)

legislature or *judicial system* of the country. It is applied, by correspondence, to the process of community playmaking with the intention of identifying participants in these projects by their relationship to control of the activity. In 1994 Open Theatre indicated that:

The Colway model of community plays is now perceived as essentially another bastion of middle-class culture.

(Open Theatre 1994: 5)

Woodruff, in 1989, claimed that the community arts-based practice at Telford made work where:

Control of the creative process is retained by the group. ... the plays are performed for working-class audiences. Of, by and for.

(Woodruff 1989: 371)

During the 1990s the issues for all community play projects subsequently crystallised into a set of common concerns with art, form, process and relationships.<sup>6</sup> Interviews with participants in the 1995 Bridlington Town community play, Come Hell or High Water, indicate the beginnings of the replacement of simple participation with the development of a strong sense of collaboration in the process. In the view of one of the participants, Brian Macdonald:

It's our environment's history being put into a play ... but with their  
<sup>7</sup> skills, we've moulded it into an art. It's a shared experience.

(Jones 1995(b): 13)

The difference between participation and collaboration in community theatre is marked by the concept of ownership - the degree of 'shared experience'.

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<sup>5</sup> The year of first publication of the Communist Manifesto.

<sup>6</sup> See Jones 1995(a):12/13.

<sup>7</sup> Macdonald is referring to the play's organisers in general, Remould Theatre Company.

*Participation* comes from the idea of 'taking part in' <sup>8</sup> whereas *collaboration* <sup>9</sup> is rooted in the idea of 'working together' (*col-laborare*). There is considerable difference, from the point of view of the amateur, between taking part in a professionally-organised community theatre project and working in conjunction with others, both amateur and professional, in the creation of an artistic event. The differences have to do with:

- the level of democracy of planning and organisation
- the hierarchies of relationships within the project
- the perceived ability of the participants to influence the direction of the project and
- the skill of the arts workers in de-mystifying their profession

An examination of these factors allows any community theatre project to be placed on a continuum of ownership which can be represented thus:

The project

belongs to the professional workers	has a shared ownership	belongs to the participants
amateur theatre controlled by professionals	communal theatre	amateur theatre made with professional advice

For a group embarking on a community theatre project part of the ownership issue consists in setting up the circumstances in which the existence of this particular continuum can be discovered, presented and discussed by all participants. These differences are underlined on the one hand by Jellicoe's

<sup>8</sup> The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines 'participation' as "The action or fact of partaking, having or forming part of" and 'partaking' as "taking part in" (1589).

description of the Colway approach as 'discovering how to involve people in the creation of a work of art' (Jellicoe 1987:xviii) - a *participatory approach* and, on the other hand, the desire to work 'in conjunction with' the participants which is expressed in the aims and objectives of the Belgrade Theatre's community play (see Appendix 18). This *collaborative approach* involves the making of an implicit contract between professionals and amateurs with the express aim of coming as close as possible to fulfilling the needs of the amateurs and promoting their ownership of the project. When Jellicoe talks about 'discovering ... where to draw the line between the needs of the community and the needs of art' (Jellicoe 1987:xviii) it seems clear that, in the final analysis for the Colway Theatre Trust, the *play's the thing*. Her participatory method produces theatre made *for* the community *by* professionals whereas alternative, collaborative methods move towards communal theatre-making in which ownership of both process and product remain, as far as possible, with the participants.

## A poetics of liberation ?

The starting point for this investigation is the idea of an arts entitlement.

Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that:

Everyone has the right freely to *participate* in the cultural life of the community, to *enjoy* the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines a 'collaborator' as "one who works in conjunction with others".

<sup>10</sup> My emphasis.

The study seeks to examine the nature and potential of that participation and enjoyment. An investigation of aspects of the history of cultural participation will attempt to discover how comprehensive it has been - whether 'everyone' has indeed the right and the opportunity for involvement in the arts. The main questions of this study derive first, from an interrogation of the idea of an arts entitlement which comes from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and second, from issues of ownership of performance such as those which are raised by the work of Boal. These questions are:

- Where does the community play fit into the ideology and practice of contemporary theatre?
- Is there a practical poetics <sup>11</sup> of liberation which is available to large numbers of people?
- Is there a Boalian poetics which operates for the actor as well as the spectator?
- Can participation in communal performance empower ordinary people in the way that Boal conceives for his actors?

Woodruff believes that it can and the issue therefore becomes one of identifying this kind of liberating poetics within the wide range of current community play practice.

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<sup>11</sup> This usage derives from Boal and his exploration of what he calls 'lyric poetry' and 'epic poetry'. The forum for this investigation is the form and function of the drama and he aligns lyric poetry with the idea of the character as subject and epic poetry with the idea of the character as object. These terms roughly correspond with Brecht's epic and dramatic theatre. The term 'poetics' has, perhaps, been superseded by 'dramaturgy' in the contemporary metalanguage of theatre studies but, since Boal's work is of central importance to this study, I have retained Boal's usage.

'This form of community play can be found throughout the world ... a group of workers, employed and unemployed, come together to create theatre which expresses their values, their experiences and their views of the world around them.

(Woodruff 1989:371)

In investigating these issues the study, is concerned first with the arts in general and specifically with theatre and, second with education in its broadest sense. The focus of the study is the *developing* phenomenon of the community play, its relationship to education in and through the arts, its nature and location in the contemporary theatrical world and its potential as an agent of cultural participation in the life of the community.

'Perhaps the participatory processes of community plays ... open up new aesthetic possibilities which promise a fundamentally dialectical form of efficacy for community play performance.'

(Kershaw 1992:191)

## Aesthetic justice

The universal declaration of human rights is a clear statement of a desire for an aesthetically just society. The search for this 'aesthetic justice' is historically comparatively recent and has been conducted in a number of arenas including philosophy, education and the practice of the arts. Questions of the political, social and educational functions of the arts are central to this study and the use of the arts for transcending individuality, exploring meaning and developing community is an important starting point.

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<sup>12</sup> My emphasis.

Evidently man wants to be more than just himself. He wants to be a *whole* man. He is not satisfied with being a separate individual; out of the partiality of his individual life he strives towards a 'fulness' (sic) that he senses and demands, towards a fulness of life of which individuality with all its limitations cheats him, towards a more comprehensible, a more just world, a world that *makes sense*.

(Fischer 1963:8)

Fischer's view is important since it has been a pointer towards the right background questions to ask in the examination of the level of aesthetic justice of society. Do we seek 'comprehension' and 'fulness' in the terms that Fischer outlines? If we do, do we use participation in the arts (participation in community plays, for the purpose of this study) as an instrument in our search? To whom does 'we' refer? Fischer uses 'man' to indicate the whole of humanity. How do we define or select the communities of participation in the community theatre? What is the role and potential of participation in the arts in producing 'a more comprehensible, a more just world'. Do we seek a 'world that *makes sense*'?

The search for 'comprehension'- for meaning is a human need and, despite the current claims of writers like Arnold Wesker to ownership and sole understanding of the meaning in their work <sup>13</sup>, this study proceeds from the position that meaning is not immutable but is created, adjusted or 'read' by individuals in the context of their society and of their life experience.

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<sup>13</sup> Wesker's comments at the University of Birmingham were followed by an article in the national press. See Wesker (15.4.1992) 'Playing with the writer's rights', *The Guardian*.



The structuralist emphasis on the constructedness of human meaning represented a major advance. Meaning was neither a private experience nor a divinely ordained occurrence: it was the product of certain shared systems of signification.

(Eagleton 1983:107)

However, many people have not been able to share some of these systems of signification. Works of art, the products of what Hodgson, supporting Fischer's view, has called 'the central desire of man to find form, pattern and purpose in his very existence' (Hodgson 1974:33/4) are the property of a very small and powerful social group. In Marxist terms this represents the bourgeois ownership and control of *cultural capital* which is viewed by this study as socially inequitable.

## Haughty Culture

The process of creation is embedded with the comprehensions and values of society and imbues the art created with the comprehensions of the individual. It presents a picture of the world. But whose world? If the creators of art are not representative of a broad spectrum of society, but of a minority, then their work may have little relevance for the majority and may actively prevent the sense of 'fulness' which Fischer says human beings desire. The majority of consumers of that art will see a world picture which does not correspond to their comprehension of the world, which presents them with a distorted meaning and which effectively denies them the participation enshrined in the arts entitlement of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Beardsley's development of the concept of 'aesthetic justice' serves to identify its polar opposite. The picture it reveals is of an aesthetically unjust world in which

the lives, worlds, values and comprehensions of many people are culturally invisible.

## Broader definitions

Education in and through the arts in schools, communities, arts centres and performance/exhibition spaces presents an opportunity to counteract aesthetic injustice, to restore the social balance of art and to reveal the existence of the many. This has been tackled in a number of ways through formal and informal education as well as through the professional arts. There has been a vigorous development of the formal arts curriculum and of outreach/education work for professional artists in recent years. Teachers have come to understand the importance of making connections for their pupils between the artist, the process and the work: the focus for this kind of activity has become the residency. Professional artists have become increasingly involved in participation and demonstration alongside presentation. The public has been enabled, through workshops, classes and other outreach activities to gain a closer understanding of, and involvement with, the process of art-making rather than only being recipients of performances of events which have been devised by others. The term 'arts educator' can therefore now legitimately encompass, not only those working in formal academic contexts, but also arts professionals engaged in projects, residencies and visits to educational institutions <sup>14</sup> as well as those arts administrators and policymakers who direct the work of arts practitioners. For some, if not all, of these arts

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<sup>14</sup> This includes community play projects.

professionals this is part and parcel of a more general 'de-mystification' of the arts and can be seen as part of a move to use the arts instrumentally as a means of cultural empowerment. The term 'empowerment' is, to a certain extent, problematic. It raises a number of questions about the ethics of the enabling process and whether professional theatre workers are, indeed, able to 'empower' amateur participants without condescension. However, if the term is viewed as an aspect of cultural participation, then the debate begins to centre around three key areas:

empowerment as a self-actualising process for the participant

empowerment to develop specific theatre skills

empowerment to promote social action

By this broad definition, community play practitioners are arts educators but this study seeks to investigate the extent of the heuristic value of their work which depends on the particular model of practice which is used.

## Organisation

Chapter 1, *Aesthetic justice*, sets out the argument of the thesis and recognises that the relationship of theatre to social concern did not emerge, *ex cathedra*, in the late 1970s. It offers a view of some of the historical roots of theatre as empowerment in the creation of democratic theatre forms after the French Revolution and, relating this to the rejection of Naturalism and the search for Realism, looks to apply Marx's analysis of social structure to current theatre practice.

In developing the argument of the study, chapters 2, 3 and 4 identify connections between three disparate areas of theory and include reviews of the literature which is relevant to each of these areas. Chapter 2, *Theatre and empowerment*, examines theatre and political concern by investigating the search for a popular or proletarian theatre within the mainstream. Chapter 3, *Reaching out to the public*, examines theatre and educational concern by quantifying recent developments in participatory and outreach activities. Chapter 4, *Peoples' performance*, examines theatre and social concern by presenting an overview of the recent history of the arts in the community. Key issues from these sets of literature are brought together in Chapter 5, *Communal theatre*, which presents a case study of the community play activity of the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry comparing it to Jellicoe's Colway Theatre Trust model. The conclusion of the study presents a view of the diversity of current community theatre practice and offers a new model of participatory theatre in the 1990s. This model enables current practices to be codified and understood according to the key concepts of the study: aesthetic justice, aesthetic materialism and communal theatre.

### **The case study: methodology**

Understandings of current practice in community playmaking have been gained in the field as well as through the literature. Key practitioners have been interviewed and performances have been observed but the main fieldwork has consisted of an extended and detailed case study of the community play methodology of the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry. This took the

form of participant observation during the gestation and production of the 1992 Belgrade community play Diamonds in the Dust.

Dissatisfaction with the Colway Theatre Trust model has led to the development of a series of alternatives which centred on the theories and investigations of Open Theatre Company and the practice of the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry. The case study traces the origins of the Belgrade's practice from Ron Hutchinson's Risky City <sup>15</sup> through the work of the Belgrade's Youth Theatre in the late 1980s to the Community Department's 1990 community play In Search of Cofa's Tree by Richard Osborne. As background to the fieldwork, the results of an evaluation of the 1990 Community Play were studied together with the participant and devisers' diaries. The performance and script itself was studied and the director/writer, Richard Osborne, was interviewed. The case study then uses the history of community play development to focus on the Belgrade's 1992 Community Play Diamonds in the Dust and analyses the results of questionnaires and interviews to construct a picture of the experience of the participants and of the theatre practitioners involved. A general questionnaire to the whole constituency of interest was used to identify a small group of key participants who were then interviewed during the devising period, during the rehearsal period and after the performance. A group of the theatre professionals involved were also interviewed as was the artistic director of the Belgrade Theatre, Robert Hamblin. This investigation was undertaken to provide qualitative support

for the narrative of the study. Participant observation of this kind can only contribute usefully within the interpretative tradition. The material provided by the observation is used to give a picture of the world of the Belgrade model community play participant. This picture is then used to test further the key concepts of the study.

## Conclusions

With respect to the working practices of the community department of The Belgrade Theatre, conclusions are drawn about the possibility of devising an aesthetically just methodology of community play animation which challenges Jellicoe's position. However, the study recognises that dissatisfaction with the Colway Theatre Trust model has produced a range of alternative practices of which the work of the Belgrade is comparatively high-profile. Each of the range of alternative practices embodies and enacts a slightly different relationship to the means of cultural production for its participants.

The study, therefore, concludes with a neo-Brechtian table of differences between the main strands of participatory theatre in the 1990s. This table offers a means of codifying the range of current practice according to Kelly's idea of 'direct participation in living culture' which unifies the three key concepts of the study. Placement of current practice according to the table makes transparent the extent of the heuristic value of each type of community theatre and therefore its potential for empowerment. It also identifies not only

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<sup>15</sup> A main house commission about Coventry people.

the potential poetics of liberation: the extent to which the community play participant, *pace* Boal, 'thinks and acts for himself' but also the extent to which each type of community theatre can be regarded as communal theatre.

# 1

## Aesthetic justice

Throughout the twentieth century the English drama has, in general, been about the ruling class.

Harold Hobson <sup>1</sup>

### Art and society

This chapter uses four significant moments in the modern history of the relationship of the arts to society as the basis for making the case that community theatre and, especially, community plays can assist the move towards a more aesthetically just society. Chronologically, though not in order of priority for the study, they are:

- The French Revolution

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<sup>1</sup> Hobson H *Theatre in Britain* Oxford: Phaidon, 1984: 18.



- Realism in art and Naturalism in theatre
- the decline of private patronage and the rise of class consciousness
- the appearance of a state-controlled subsidy system

These four areas are not of the same order of importance either to the study or in relation to each other but there are limits to the detail that can be achieved here. This is complex territory which needs to be approached with circumspection since it is not the intention of this study either selectively to re-write the history of the nineteenth century or to give the impression that there is a direct line of cause and effect between the French revolution and the community play. However, there are some lines of development which are pertinent to the argument of the study and these centre around the concept of empowerment through art. This has its roots in the following ideas:

- a democratic performance form
- the Naturalism/Realism debate
- class conflict and cultural capital
- the relationship of the legislature to art.

The intention is to document and comment upon the search for a liberating poetics which is practical, in the sense that it relies on participation, and communal, in the sense that it involves collaborative large group activity. The concept of *communal theatre*, as proposed by this study, defines community theatre which moves from the simple involvement of ordinary people in art-making into *equitable collaboration* between professional arts workers and non-professionals. This is a democratic and potentially liberating idea which can be used to identify how far the participant is in control of the process. The

chapter examines the need for such liberation by exploring the implications of the modern contention that culture <sup>2</sup> should be democratic. Further it asks how society reached the point where Kershaw can suggest that alternative theatre 'planned to effect a fundamental modification in the cultural life of the nation' (Kershaw 1992: 15/16). The notions of aesthetic welfare and aesthetic justice are investigated and applied along with some consideration of how the arts are controlled in the late twentieth century.

### **The voice of the people**

Egbert (1970) points to the French Revolution as a significant cultural turning point arguing that its democratic power was the seed-bed for a re-appraisal of patronage. He contrasts the American version of democracy with that of post-Revolutionary France. The American concept, he argues, was:

... highly individualistic: it was regarded by its proponents as implying a multitude of individual voices ... (*whereas the French had a*) <sup>3</sup>... conception of the voice of the people as a whole which became dominant in the French Revolution.  
(Egbert 1970: 14)

The French Revolution, with its new ideas of democracy in general and art in particular, marked a change in the balance of cultural power which according to Egbert 'fostered a revolution in patronage and taste'. The theatrical

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<sup>2</sup> The term 'culture' is ambiguous. Raymond Williams describes it as 'one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language' (Williams 1983:87). In this study it is not used in the general anthropological sense to denote values, religion etc. but in the wider sense of what Williams calls the 'independent, abstract noun which describes the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity ... culture is music, literature, painting and sculpture, theatre and film'. (Williams 1983:90).

<sup>3</sup> My addition.

manifestation of this democratic revolution was the invention of a form which reflected the need for a cultural site for republican content. Brooks, in his paper *The Melodramatic Imagination*,<sup>4</sup> (Brooks:1992) refers to the creation of a proto-Melodrama during, and as a result of, the French Revolution. The Revolution, in Brooks' analysis, was a summons to individual accountability and the human body itself was implicated in the construction of meanings by becoming the prime site of theatrical signification.<sup>5</sup> Melodrama is an inherently democratic, egalitarian theatre form. It relies on simple, easily understood parables, black and white characterisation, a physical clarity involving the signification of content through tableaux and the powerful emotional montage of word and music to underscore the narrative. The world view unambiguously presented by the physical style of melodrama has a strong moral tone. Good always triumphs over evil, however improbable this might seem in the circumstances of the narrative. Melodrama is the basis of a new aesthetics of embodiment, which is demonstrated by a very early melodramatic text, Silvain Maréchal's Le Jugement Dernière des Rois (The Last Judgement of the Kings c.1790). Maréchal's play points to the creation of citizen as opposed to subject by enacting that there are no more kings.

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<sup>4</sup> Keynote address at the British Film Institute Melodrama Conference, London University, July 1992.

<sup>5</sup> According to Brooks, in the French Revolution the body was held accountable; people paid for any failure to account for their actions with their body. This, in theatre, meant that a fresh importance was placed on the body as the prime site of signification. Based on the pre-Freudian notion that only the body can speak for the soul in moments of high passion, i.e. those moments symbolised in dramatic representations, this led to the re-statement of a theatrical need for a simple and unambiguous differentiation between the bodies of victims and villains. (Brooks:1992)

According to Egbert:

Out of the related ideas of the social organism<sup>6</sup> and mass democracy, there could and did grow up the belief that to be democratic good art must be aimed at the masses, must be socially useful, socially functional and to this end must be understandable by all members of society.

(Egbert 1970: 16/17) <sup>7</sup>

The need for democratic art, and an art which matches its formal properties to its content, expressed here by melodrama is a theme which has been picked up at various points between the late eighteenth century and the present day, notably by concerns with Realism and Naturalism, and which has informed the efforts of some theatre practitioners in the twentieth century to create a proletarian or popular theatre form.<sup>8</sup>

### **The enactment of real life**

The French Revolution, especially after the abdication and exile of Charles X, the last Bourbon King in 1830, finally began to fulfil its cultural promise. The Revolution provided the circumstances in which what was symbolised by art, in all disciplines, could begin to move away from the iconography of the aristocracy.

No longer could the French artists rely on the patronage of an absolute monarch and of a nobility for which the monarch set the

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<sup>6</sup> Both Brooks and Egbert point to the influence of Rousseau's *Du Contrat Social* (1762) and *Confessions* (published posthumously in 1782) on the ideas of the social organism and the implication of the body in the construction of meaning.

<sup>7</sup> There is no claim being made here, however, that melodrama is 'good art', simply that, as a new democratic form, it acts as a paradigm of the changing relationship between art and society in the late eighteenth century and foreshadows later moves towards a proletarian or people's theatre.

<sup>8</sup> See Chapter Two.

tone in an unbroken artistic tradition.  
(Egbert 1970: 14)

Realism in art and, subsequently, Naturalism in theatre, can be seen to be a second significant moment in the history of the modern relationship between art and society. Amongst others, the French realist painter, Gustave Courbet (1819-1878), building on the work of Géricault and Delacroix, was responsible for a new view of subject matter. In choosing to represent images of contemporary life and including what had hitherto been considered subjects unfit for artistic endeavour, in other words peasants as opposed to the aristocracy, Courbet used his art to protest against the social system. His contribution, to the Paris Salon of 1850-51, of three 'Realistic' pictures<sup>9</sup> demonstrated that he was, in his own words:

... not only a socialist but also a democrat and a republican, in a word a partisan of all revolution, and above all a realist.  
(Mantz 1878: 523/4)<sup>10</sup>

The link between realism and social radicalism, symbolised by Courbet's work, was paralleled in theatre by moves away from melodrama towards the social problem play and the theatrical equivalent of Realism in art, Naturalism.<sup>11</sup> These concerns, of Realism in art and Naturalism in theatre, with a socially inclusive depiction of 'real life' were mirrored, during the same period of the

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<sup>9</sup> 'The Burial at Ornans', 'The Stone-breakers' and 'Peasants of Flagey returning from the fair'.

<sup>10</sup> Cited in Egbert 1970: 188/189.

<sup>11</sup> See Appendix 1 for the detail of Gascoigne's distinction between Naturalism and Realism in theatre. In theatre history Realism appears in the twentieth century superseding nineteenth-century Naturalism as opposed to art history where Realism can be viewed as breaking with, and following on from, Romanticism.

nineteenth century, by the new thinking in history and economics represented by Marx. This strand of thought, historical or dialectical materialism, placed the individual at the centre of a complex network of social interaction. The new view of history was seen to offer a different perspective on the relationship of the ordinary people to those in power over them; an alternative mediation of reality. The concept of society as an agglomeration of individuals, referred to earlier in the context of a comparison between the French and American versions of democracy, was rejected by Marx in favour of a pluralist view. This sought to identify what the working class had in common and how they, as a mass, should understand their relations with the controllers of capital, the ruling class.

The human essence is no inherent abstraction in each individual. In reality it is the ensemble of social relations. Man's individualism is not limited by nature or by the state, but by a combination of all the 'social forces which act upon him. This is what Marx and Engels called 'realism'.

(Mosse 1963: 174)

What links the politico-historical with the artistic-dramatic in the nineteenth century is the desire for symbols which have, at their heart, an approach which fosters verisimilitude. The need to mediate reality, to portray things 'as they are' inevitably offers a critique of all art, of whatever discipline, which confines itself to depiction of the lives of the ruling classes. This is a class-based concept which requires the kind of radical re-appraisal of content begun in theatre by melodrama and continued during the century by naturalism. Thus Courbet could not realistically paint angels because he had never *seen* one and Marx and Engels condemned the romantic hero in the name of

historical materialism because, from their perspective, romanticism was an escape into a dream world.

### **Patronage, art and class**

A parallel can be drawn between the notion of content in art and that of history in Marxist theory. Both are ways of viewing the world. We develop understandings through our perception of history and through what we choose to depict in our art. When the past is being re-investigated a new present is being constructed.

In bourgeois society ... the past dominates the present; in communist society the present dominates the past.

(Marx & Engels 1967: 97/8)

This clearly foreshadows the theatre work of Brecht and others in the early twentieth century which sought to promote social action. This work brought together the twin notions of class consciousness and proletarian art through new views of history and of the content of the drama.

The third significant moment in the modern history of the relationship between art and society is the decline of private patronage and the rise of class consciousness. Until Marx's analysis there had been no attempt to understand the power relationships in society from the standpoint of social stratification.

According to Bottomore's view of Marx:

Social classes are defined by their relation to the means of production (ownership and non-ownership) and this becomes the basis of the view that there are in every society two principal

contending classes.<sup>12</sup>  
(Bottomore 1971: 199).

The Marxist two-class analysis provides a convenient metaphor for the movement of this chapter since key moments in the modern history of patronage are being used to reflect the contribution of art to social action. This analysis, which first suggested transfer of the ownership and control of the means of production from the bourgeoisie to the proletariat, symbolises, and to some extent parallels, a desire within the areas of cultural production which are under discussion to empower amateurs to share ownership and control of community theatre projects in ways which move towards the idea of communal theatre. This can be expressed as follows:

bourgeoisie	proletariat
professional theatre workers	amateur participants
paid	unpaid

In the more politically committed manifestations of this desire, such as Telford Community Arts,<sup>13</sup> this has been developed into a Marxist-influenced collective process where 'a group of workers, employed and unemployed, come together

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<sup>12</sup> Although Marx also identified a model of a three class system comprising capitalists, land-owners and wage-earners, the two class model will be adhered to as a metaphor rather than a political and economic verity, since Marx himself 'regarded the relationship of the individual to property as a crucial determinant of social action' (Bottomore 1971: 200) and the concerns of this study are with art and social action.

<sup>13</sup> See Chapter Four.



to create theatre which expresses their values' (Woodruff 1989:371). This alters the diagram as follows:

bourgeoisie	proletariat
	professional theatre workers amateur participants
	paid unpaid

It is an expression of solidarity in values, experiences and world views which at once begins the process of de-mystification of the expertise of theatre workers and, by locating them as co-workers in the realm of cultural production identifies 'the state' as the other 'contending class'. The position of the artist in, for example, French society pre-1789; as a servant of the ruling class, acts as a paradigm for the ownership and control of the means of artistic production. Here the artist, a member of the working class, is kept, by being freed from the need to labour manually in order to eat, and produces work which reflects the world and world-view of the ruling class. For Marx, according to Jenks, there is a powerful cultural relationship between the arts and the emergence of a general awareness of class structures:

Culture, within historical materialism, is clearly reducible to these economic factors, (the means and relations of production) but emergent in the form of class consciousness.  
(Jenks 1993: 29).

After Marx, attitudes towards the position of the artist can be seen to be revised. It becomes possible to discern a diachronic pattern which has led initially to the establishment of the twentieth century context for the creation of a responsive relationship between art and society and, ultimately, to the possibility of a people's theatre. This pattern begins in the retreat from the patronage model of art creation:

With the disintegration of traditional ties between producer and consumer (Church, patron, Academy) of the arts, particularly in Europe during the nineteenth century, the artist actually is, in certain ways, a free-floating, unattached individual not bound by patron or commission.

(Wolff 1981: 18)

The pattern is reinforced by the development of the concepts of Realism in art and Naturalism in theatre. The acceptance of the Marxist concept of class consciousness subsequently prompted revisions of the Romantic notion of the artist as an isolated, individual genius. This led the way for the establishment of the notion of the arts as a means of production. In accounting for these revisions, Wolff points to two significant historical developments:

The first was the rise of individualism concomitant with the development of industrial capitalism. The second was the actual separation of the artist from any secure form of patronage.

(Wolff 1981: 11)

The new view of the nature of art as production completed a series of linked developments which took place over two centuries.

## Aesthetic materialism

The desire of the Realists and of the Marxists to mediate reality in new ways, in Brecht's terms to present a 'picture of the world', can, if allied to the concept of entitlement enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, be seen as a kind of *aesthetic materialism*. By this I mean that, just as for Marx, economic factors are the 'materials' which determine the social organisation of the state, artistic factors can be viewed as the materials which determine the cultural or artistic organisation of the state:

- economic factors shape social circumstances
- artistic factors shape aesthetic circumstances.

The concept of aesthetic materialism which unites Marxist mediations of reality with an arts entitlement draws on what Williams has called:

The central question of the relations between 'material' and 'symbolic' production which ... have always to be related rather than contrasted.

(Williams 1983: 91)

It provides a platform from which a clear picture can be established of the lack of proletarian control of cultural capital. By making the necessary connection between symbolic and material production, the concept opens up the possibility of participation in arts activity as a general empowerment, which may lead to social action. In order to understand the significance of this for the relationship of art to society it then becomes necessary to examine the aesthetic circumstances in which the majority of people find themselves in the twentieth century. These aesthetic circumstances are often investigated purely from the standpoint of the consumption of arts products and, in terms

of attendance at performance, there is some debate about the ways in which the available statistics have been used. According to Willis the figures are stark:

... the audiences for the traditional performing arts have shown a remarkable consistency over several decades right up to the present, we might call them 'the 3-M audience' - middle-class, middle-aged and minority. ... only 5% of the population regularly attends the 'theatre/ballet/opera' and 4% 'museums/art galleries'. Only 2% of the working class attends any of these.

(Willis 1990: 10) <sup>14</sup>

Willis, however, is putting a certain gloss on the available statistics which may be seen to reflect his arguments about what constitutes the arts in contemporary culture. It is possible to argue, first, that the statistics do not fully support his view and, second, that his may not be a very sophisticated analysis.

The most detailed of recent analyses (Myerscough 1988) was commissioned jointly by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the Office of Arts and Libraries and emanated from the Policy Studies Institute. It studied arts attendances in three centres - Glasgow, Ipswich and Merseyside and based its report on information which chiefly relates to the financial year 1985/86. Subsequent commentary has often followed Myerscough's lead in asserting that participation can be measured by clear economic indicators. These indicators seem to show that the economic impact of attendance at arts events

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<sup>14</sup> Willis derives his statistics from *Cultural Trends* 1989 London: Policy Studies Institute and from *The 1987 General Household Survey*.

and attractions is much larger than had been previously been thought and Myerscough's application of what he calls the 'multiplier effects of arts spending and spin-off' produces a picture of considerable purchasing associated with the arts in this country. This contribution to understanding of the commodification of art is represented by Myerscough by a series of tables <sup>15</sup> and leads him to generic statements about the aesthetic circumstances of the population.

The results of the survey show that the *majority of the population* (62 to 65 per cent) in the three study regions had attended at least one arts event or attraction in the previous 12 months. ... Museums and galleries were the most popular attractions 'reaching' between 31 per cent (Ipswich) and 39 per cent (Glasgow) of the adult population. Roughly one third had visited a cinema. Plays and musicals attracted a significant minority to the theatre, 17 per cent in Glasgow, 24 per cent in Merseyside and 28 per cent in Ipswich. (Myerscough 1988: 120. My emphasis)

The fact that Myerscough includes a very wide range of 'arts attractions' in his statistics makes detailed scrutiny difficult and it is true that the 'reach' of the performing arts to the populace as a whole (before differentiation by social class) would look quite different if museum and cinema attendance were removed. As the quotation indicates, theatre in general, averaged across the three regions studied, reached about 23 per cent of the adult population.

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<sup>15</sup> Seven of the most relevant are:

1. 2.17 Reach of the arts: by social class in three study regions
2. 2.19 Reach of the arts amongst ABC1s by region, 1985/86
3. 2.20 Reach of the arts amongst C2DEs by region, 1985/86
4. 8.1 Attendance at arts events and attractions: by social class and engagement in amateur activities
5. 8.5 Amateur participation in the arts: by social class, Glasgow and Ipswich regions
6. 8.6 Participation and attendance at arts events by social class.
7. 10.7 Attendances at theatres and concerts: by social class. (Source: Myerscough 1988).

When Myerscough differentiates his statistics by class,<sup>16</sup> the attendance at plays and musicals, averaged across the three regions, reveals 35.33 per cent take up by ABC1s and 17 per cent take up by C2DEs. Even by these statistics there is a social class imbalance which shows that 50 per cent fewer of C2DEs attend theatre.

In arguing that the market for the arts in the late 1980s was growing Myerscough acknowledges the lacunae in his statistical database:

For most arts events and attractions the market would appear to have been expanding in recent years. This confirms the conclusion ... that consumer spending showed an upward trend. It is less clear that the increase has been enjoyed by all sections of the arts and in all parts of the country. Comprehensive data on arts attendances are not available and so interpretation of trends must be approached with caution.  
(Myerscough 1988:16)

Where Willis' analysis may be limited by his ethnographic approach Myerscough may be to some degree circumscribed by the strength of his focus on the economic impact of the arts and by the relative difficulty posed by an analysis counted by attendances rather than by individuals. For example, Myerscough indicates that:

It is well recognised that very active minorities of enthusiasts clock up large proportions of total attendances for some arts attractions ... It has been estimated ... (at the Royal Festival Hall) that 99,000 individuals accounted for a total sale of 893,000 tickets in 1982/3 ... by the same token, it would appear that the 249,000 tickets sold for

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<sup>16</sup> He groups together ABC1s in one table (2.19 p.29) and C2Des in another table (2.20 p.30).

the Royal Opera in 1982/3 were purchased by some 47,000 individuals.<sup>17</sup>

(Myerscough 1988: 30/31)

Myerscough's view therefore, like that of Willis, has not gone unchallenged and, as Gordon Hughes points out in *Policy Studies*, (Hughes 1989) the PSI analysis may only be of value as a contribution to the debate about funding levels but according to Hughes:

Unfortunately, the nature of the data collected and the analytical underpinnings of the studies are at their weakest when it comes to addressing this key question.

(Hughes 1989:34)

These analyses put the views of Willis into perspective and reveal his relevance for this study because the case being argued here is for a class-based view of participation and collaboration in cultural production rather than consumption as it may be defined and conditioned by commercial and economic concerns. This draws attention to the need for a different analysis of the importance of the arts in the lives of ordinary people from that presented by statements about the contribution to the economy that may be made by the purchase of, for example, food and drink before or after attendance at a performance. Whichever figures are used the enjoyment aspect of the arts entitlement, as illuminated by attendance statistics, is clearly limited to a small minority of the population. The picture of the world perceived by the

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<sup>17</sup> Myerscough does not seem, either, to have taken account of the inability of box office computer systems to describe all their customers. They can only report on the bookers.

working class can therefore be seen to be an unjust one from which they may appear to be absent.

In the early 1970s the American philosopher, Beardsley, framed a Theory of Aesthetic Justice.<sup>18</sup> This represents a theoretical philosophy of the arts which can form the foundation of an examination of the aesthetic circumstances of the people. Beardsley's theory divides into two theoretical propositions; aesthetic wealth and aesthetic value, and, in terms of practice, under the heading of aesthetic welfare, two proposals for action; aesthetic opportunity and aesthetic capability. This can be represented as follows:

Beardsley's Theory of Aesthetic Justice
A. Theory: Aesthetic Wealth
- aesthetic value
B. Practice: Aesthetic Welfare
- aesthetic opportunity
- aesthetic capability

In Beardsley's theory, whether classified as 'art' or not, all objects have an aesthetic value because they possess the capacity 'to raise the (person's) aesthetic level of experience significantly' (Beardsley 1973: 50). Although he

<sup>18</sup> See Beardsley 1973:49-61.



admits the need for a debate about the inclusion or exclusion of objects<sup>19</sup> he uses the concept to inform a further category:

Considering a particular society ... we can form the concept of the totality of objects ... that possess discernible aesthetic value. ... This totality of aesthetically valuable objects I call the aesthetic wealth of that society.

(Beardsley 1973: 50/51)

Beardsley implicitly invokes the notion of entitlement when he moves on from the general potential of aesthetic wealth to, in the terms of this study, shape aesthetic circumstances. He moves from theory to possible practice in suggesting:

Wealth is a potentiality; welfare is its actualization. The *aesthetic welfare* of a society at a given time consists of all the aesthetic levels of experience of members of the society at a given time.

(Beardsley 1973: 51)

The concept of aesthetic welfare provides the first yardstick for the 'measurement' of the level of aesthetic justice of a society and can be framed by reference to notions which, in the current terminology, have become known as 'access' and 'participation'. The underlying questions raised by Beardsley's ensuing diatribe against the 'deaccessioning' policy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York are those of the mechanics of providing everyone in a society with the opportunity to benefit from the total aesthetic wealth of

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<sup>19</sup> Beardsley believes that aesthetic value is 'one of the general and fundamental categories of value.' Objects to be debated for their aesthetic value 'may include natural objects and scenes, articles of use and decoration, and what in some narrower sense are marked off as works of art.' The necessity for philosophical precision implied by these qualifying comments is not seen to prejudice the value of the general theory as far as it is applied in this study since Beardsley's ideas, which principally concern educational policy, are being used, by transference, in the field of community theatre.

that society<sup>20</sup> and to share in its *cultural capital*.<sup>21</sup> These mechanics are the cornerstone of aesthetic justice and can be used to come to a view of the availability of aesthetic benefit for any society's members. The artistic factors here are seen as aspects of public policy in the arts. As Beardsley comments:

It may be that ... the United States has achieved a state of "aesthetic affluence." But, like other kinds of affluence which we boast, it seems to allow enormous deprivation at the lower end of the scale.

(Beardsley 1973: 53)

Current conceptions of justice and injustice primarily relate to those qualities displayed in the exercise of a judicial or administrative function, however, Beardsley's usage, and herein lies its power, is more reminiscent of the Platonic <sup>22</sup> concept as outlined in the early Socratic dialogues. It is much more closely aligned to contemporary ideas of *morality* and *duty* - of the reflexive relationship between society and the individual - since it is Plato's doctrine that justice is a part of human virtue, or excellence. Following these principles an aesthetically just society is, then, clearly a moral ideal since injustice would be limited by the duty of the contemporary equivalent of Socrates' philosopher-kings to exercise their power in the interests of the general welfare of the population. More recently these concerns have been investigated by, amongst

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<sup>20</sup> Beardsley refers to the sale of parts of the collection to fund the purchase of new works. He inveighs against this because he believes the gallery has:

'... a duty (which they apparently do not acknowledge) to preserve the welfare of their society. This would require them to sell only to other museums or institutions that can make the paintings publicly accessible.'

(Beardsley 1973: 52)

<sup>21</sup> Approaches to these issues are discussed later in this chapter with reference to the views of Sir Roy Shaw and dealt with more fully when the work of Owen Kelly is examined in Chapter Four.

others, Rawls (1972) and Dworkin (1977). Rawls describes justice as one of the first human virtues and indicates that since equality amongst citizens is philosophically axiomatic, socio-political organisation is a Utilitarian collaboration based in social welfare. However, he goes on to point out that:

...there is a conflict of interests since persons are not indifferent as to how the greater benefits produced by their collaboration are distributed.

(Rawls 1972:4)

For Rawls the principles of social justice are distributive since they:

...provide a way of assigning rights and duties in the basic institutions of society and they define the appropriate distribution of the benefits and burdens of social co-operation. (Rawls 1972:4)

These principles provide a means of understanding the justness of the political constitution and economic and social organisation since institutions such as these are deemed to be just when 'no arbitrary distinctions are made between persons in the assigning of basic rights' (Rawls 1972:5). According to Dworkin people 'have a right to equal respect and concern in the design of political institutions' (Dworkin 1977:182) and this brings the idea of distributive justice as fairness into contention with the classical liberal conception of citizenship which it appears to support. It reveals justice as fairness to be, according to Dworkin, 'a particularly subtle rationalisation of the *status quo*' (Dworkin 1977:182) and, therefore, something which a wider application of the moral ideal would seek to call into question. A set of rights which enabled ordinary

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<sup>22</sup> For example, according to Plato, if a guilty criminal is appropriately sentenced then we believe the judge to have acted justly and the criminal to have committed an act of injustice against society. See Book 1 of *The Republic*.

people to participate in the design of institutions which governed them could lead to significant challenges to the status quo at which 'good citizens' might demur. Boal (1979), in his chapter *What is Justice?*, draws some of these arguments into the aesthetic dimension by relating them to Brechtian and Hegelian ideas about the differences between the character as subject and the character as object.<sup>23</sup> He indicates that understandings based on Greek systems use perceived reality as their starting point and do not 'consider the possibility of transforming the already existing inequalities' (Boal 1979:23). He concludes from this that justice derived from these understandings will always be proportional rather than equal and that for good citizens 'happiness consists in obeying the laws'. (Boal 1979:24). Systems based on these types of compliance work counter to Beardsley's idea of aesthetic welfare and imply greater social responsibility than the merely distributive. In the aesthetic dimension they imply the setting up of practical enabling mechanisms which promote the aesthetic entitlement of every citizen and thereby contribute to a more aesthetically just society. These are the principles of aesthetic equity. Some of these models which can promote access and deepen participation into collaboration are the subject of the fieldwork in this study.

The aesthetic welfare argument can be transferred across the Atlantic and linked to the concept of aesthetic materialism in order to examine both the

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<sup>23</sup> See the introduction to this study: footnote 11.

aesthetic circumstances of this country, particularly at 'the lower end of the scale,' and the notions of aesthetic opportunity and aesthetic capability.

Aesthetic opportunity: the number and/or quality of available objects with aesthetic value ... aesthetic capability: the number and ability of persons to take advantage of the opportunities presented.  
(Beardsley 1973: 56)

Beardsley locates the responsibility for the practical promotion of aesthetic welfare within the formal context of 'educational or instructional institutions.' He therefore defines the broad cultural difficulties of aesthetic opportunity and aesthetic capability as narrow educational problems.<sup>24</sup>

## The aesthetic judicial system

Beardsley's perception of the need for a theory and the theory itself combine to reveal a picture of its opposite. Both American and British societies are revealed to be aesthetically unjust. Art is seen to be the possession of a select minority not the entitlement of the majority whose aesthetic circumstances are inevitably diminished. In Beardsley's terms many people have no aesthetic opportunity. As Appleyard, arguing for the creation of a new vision in the arts, commented in the mid-eighties, the arts are seen to be:

... the province of the Culture Club, with its select and secretive committee and its shifting body of members, which has expropriated the idea of art and is now at a loss to know what to do with it.  
(Appleyard 1984: 15)

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<sup>24</sup> This aspect of the application of Beardsley's theory is further developed in Di Maggio P. & Michael Useem, 'The Arts in Education and Cultural Participation: the Social Role of Aesthetic Education and the Arts,' *Journal of Aesthetic Education* Vol. 14 Part 4 pp.55-72. As shown by the wide definition of the arts educator in the introduction to this study and by the arguments of Chapters Three and Four, this study does not accept the narrowness of Beardsley's practical suggestions.

The application of a Marxist perspective to the move from private to public patronage which has characterised the cultural policy of this century is a shift of power over the means of artistic production by virtue of control of the system of subsidy.

The location of aesthetic power within the state is the fourth significant moment in the history of the modern relationship of the arts to society. In Britain it is centred around the creation of what is now the Arts Council of England (A.C.E.) and the Regional Arts Boards (R.A.B.s). These quangos, together with local authorities, form an *aesthetic judicial system*. Although created and ostensibly operated on the 'arm's length principle' the Arts Council, as Hutchison has pointed out, nevertheless remains tied to the political will.

Though not in the pocket of the Government the Arts Council is a creature of Government, a partner with Government.  
(Hutchison 1982: 17)

Although this is not an exact analogy there is enough correspondence in the two models to make it useful. The key points of the analogy are:

- the constitution of a body with the power to make judgements
- the existence of a formal system which
- delineates the parameters of judgement
- identifies the penalties for transgression and
- oversees the consequences of judgement

If pursued further than a metaphor the analogy breaks down because it is not an exact congruent fit. There is no equivalent of 'law' within the aesthetic

system but there are conventions by which decisions are made and, in the current climate of public accountability, A.C.E./R.A.B. policy statements are closely tied to funding decisions which may give them a similar status to laws in the eyes of arts workers. The aesthetic judicial system is not new but it is powerful. As Hutchison indicates, state patronage for the arts in this country has been developed since roughly the time of the French Revolution.

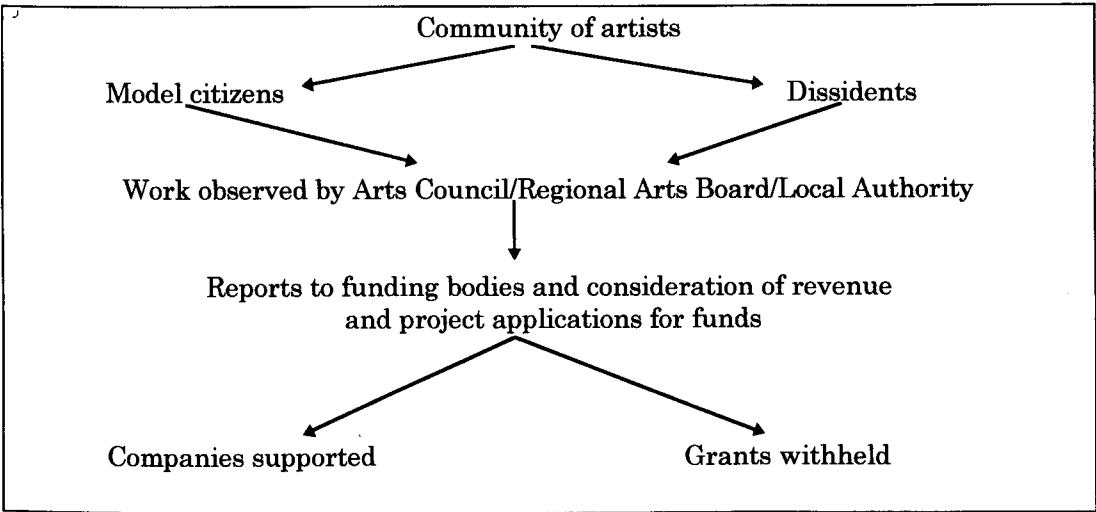
Government support for the arts did not begin with the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA) and its successor the Arts Council. It has developed over the last two centuries out of the royal patronage that included George III's active involvement in the affairs of the fledgling Royal Academy which was founded in 1768.

(Hutchison 1982: 15)

The debate about state subsidy has been in focus since the Second World War and has been particularly sharp since the 1979 Thatcher administration's application of free market principles to all aspects of social organisation.<sup>25</sup> From being a committee which began its work, as CEMA in 1945, in a determinedly non-interventionist fashion, what is now the Arts Council of England (ACE) has developed policies for very many, if not all, aspects of state patronage. Funding priorities and parameters are set in London and given regional specificity by the mission statements of the Regional Arts Boards. Whether or not these policies are used to penalise certain kinds of practitioner, as McGrath (1990) argues, it is certainly the case, regardless of any financial constraint, that the existence of the policies means that some work can be funded and some cannot. This is a quasi-judicial relationship between arts

producers and arts funders. As in the legal system there exists a cultural prosecution and defence; an aesthetic judge and jury, and, without doubt, sentencing procedures for those found to be on the wrong side of cultural conventions. Within the community of artists there can be seen to be both model citizens and dissidents all of whose actions are observed by the cultural 'police' - Regional Arts Board officers, Local Authority arts development workers and so on. Their job is, in part, in this view, to mediate locally the policy documents of the Arts Council and to report on arts activity to the regional funding bodies, who are the local judges. This process is carried out in the form of annual and project funding applications which result in the pronouncement of sentence; companies are supported and live or grants are withheld and projects die.<sup>26</sup> This relationship can be represented as follows:

**The aesthetic judicial system**



<sup>25</sup> See Kershaw 1992: 175-189 for a discussion of this as it relates to contemporary radical theatre.

<sup>26</sup> This is, of course, a description of the conspiracy theory of state patronage of the arts but it serves to identify that arts workers, who exist in a hierarchical system, are subject, potentially, to the same kind of disempowering apparatus as are ordinary people who find themselves culturally voiceless.



By controlling policy and funding mechanisms, the state controls the aesthetic circumstances of the populace. It has a powerful role in both ensuring the survival of art forms and key companies and artists and in supporting and promoting new work across the artistic board but by extending Beardsley's 'deaccessioning' argument it can be suggested that this is not merely a role but a duty.<sup>27</sup> It can be further argued that the aesthetic judicial system is failing in this duty when the notion of entitlement is appended. Owusu (1986) indicates that there have been deep-seated intercultural problems which disadvantage minority cultures in this country. These problems are to do with the definitions of the arts which constitute the dominant aesthetic of the nation and which operate principally in formal education and in the arts funding system. Both sectors retain the currency of what are, essentially, 18th century European definitions of the arts.<sup>28</sup> Owusu's main point is that the Afro-Caribbean arts do not work within, or necessarily recognise, the largely white European disciplines. This leads to Black British culture being perceived as outside 'mainstream' art and separated from the dominant aesthetic. According to Owusu, the Afro-Caribbean attitude to the arts is a social, community attitude redolent of the oral transmission of culture, which he terms 'orature'.

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<sup>27</sup> See footnote 13, this chapter.

<sup>28</sup> Williams (1983: 41/42) charts the lineage of the term 'art' from the seven liberal arts of the medieval university curriculum (grammar, logic, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry, music, astronomy) to the 16th-century usage of the term 'artist' to mean someone working in an area presided over by one of the seven muses (history, poetry, comedy, tragedy, music, dancing, astronomy). From the latter is derived the basis of the discipline divisions which remain current in the dominant aesthetic.

Orature is an aesthetic, a multi-levelled, multi-process fusion of the political and cultural, of the artforms and languages, which is grounded in the experience, traditions and aspirations of Black people.

(Owusu 1986: 25)

The attitude as a whole can be summed up by the word 'carnival'. The difficulty arises when it is required to describe this in the terms of the dominant aesthetic. As Owusu indicates,

The understanding we are trying to reach may not be easily assimilated and articulated, for we are dealing with a different cultural world view that does not lend itself easily to the language of artistic compartmentalisation of the bourgeois arts.

(Owusu 1986: 129)

The Notting Hill Carnival, which Owusu uses to describe the orature principle, has to be classified as an integrated arts event but it is not viewed as 'integrated' by the participants. This terminology is only of value to the 'extra-cultural' observers and funding bodies who are bound by their own set of discipline categories.

There is clearly an urgent need for funding bodies to reassess their policies on carnival ... certain ideological barriers will have to be broken down.

(Owusu 1986: 15)

Owusu delineates a set of funding difficulties which can be seen as a symbol of a deeper problem which he relates to the suppression of 'popular black creativity' and parallels with what, for him, is a systematic British repression of outdoor recreation following enclosure and the industrial revolution.<sup>29</sup> For Owusu the kernel of events like the Notting Hill carnival is the expression of a

working class aesthetic and the celebration of a 'popular participation, popular processes of creativity and so on'. The burden of Owusu's argument is that by failing to grapple with cultural policies which are founded on outmoded definitions of the arts, the aesthetic judicial system is disadvantaging Black British culture which is a popular, or proletarian, culture.

In orature, the most important "actors", "poets", "directors" and "painters" are the people, the masses living out their life dramas and expressing them through cultural media and institutions.  
(Owusu 1986: 130)

Owusu is here describing a mediation of reality through carnival which is paralleled in theatre in the principles and work of McGrath who, like Owusu, sought to find ways of giving expression to working class experience. McGrath, beginning with a desire to create theatre as opposed to the dramatic literature he saw being supported by the Royal Court in the early 1960s, expressed his support for a popular theatre by objecting to a number of assumptions about theatre and theatre audiences. Of his five objections<sup>30</sup> two articulate his position most clearly. McGrath does not accept:

3. that the "audience" for theatre is an idealized, white, middle-class etc., person and that all theatre should be dominated by the tastes and values of such a person; ...
5. That the so-called "traditional values" of English literature are now anything other than the indirect cultural expression of the dominance over the

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<sup>29</sup> See Owusu 1986: 13.14. He discusses the banning of bonfires, fairs and so on and argues that this is not a merely a Black but also a class problem.

<sup>30</sup> The other assumptions that McGrath objects to are as follows:

1. that all art is universal, capable of meaning the same to all people;
2. that the more 'universal' it is, the better it is;
4. that, therefore, an audience without such an idealised person's values is an inferior audience;

McGrath 1981: 3/4

whole of Britain of the ruling class of the south-east of England.  
(McGrath 1981: 4)

Rejecting the notion that 'art is universal, capable of meaning the same to all people', McGrath argues that:

... the meaning, and value, of theatre can clearly change from country to country, group to group, and - significantly - from class to class.

(McGrath 1981: 2)

He proposes the creation of new systems for the mediation of reality which place the working class life experience at the centre of the content, if not of the process,<sup>31</sup> of theatre and argues for:

... a more active intervention by the theatre in forming contemporary life and contributing to the future of our society.

(McGrath 1981: 1)

Owusu and McGrath both champion minority cultures; the Black British and the working class, although these are by no means discrete. They both argue in terms which Marx and Brecht would certainly recognise, for new performative forms, and are eloquent in their expression of contemporary society as aesthetically unjust.

## Redressing the balance

Despite the fact that Lord Goodman declared that 'People have a right not to be cultured ... Perhaps the last freedom left is the freedom from culture,'<sup>32</sup> there have been, during the post-war period, two principal theoretical and

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<sup>31</sup> This decision may well have made a significant contribution to the creation of an aesthetic and ideological space for communal theatre. See later in this chapter.

practical approaches to the problem of an aesthetically unjust society; gradualism and aesthetic materialism. They divide along political lines and can be codified thus:

<u>Gradualism</u>	<u>Aesthetic materialism</u>
The democratisation of culture	Cultural democracy
Access	Participation
Beardsley's aesthetic opportunity	Beardsley's aesthetic capability

The items in the left hand list are related by the paternalistic, liberal-humanist stance of operating within the existing system. Thus, opening access to larger numbers of people increases their range of aesthetic opportunities and is a gradualist contribution to the democratisation of culture. This is a vicarious approach which produces what Kelly (1984) calls *secondary understandings* of art objects (see later in this chapter). The items in the right hand list are related by the enabling stance of sharing power over art in an egalitarian fashion - effectively changing the system which reserves art-making for an élite. Thus, participating in creation develops people's aesthetic capability and is an aesthetic materialist contribution to cultural democracy. This is an empowering hands-on approach which produces what Kelly calls *primary understandings* of art. The diagram above raises the following questions which are dealt with in the remainder of this chapter:

- which approach has been preferred?

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<sup>32</sup> Cited in Shaw 1987: 119.

- where can the results of each approach be seen?
- how can each approach best contribute to solving the problem of aesthetic injustice?

The most visible, most well-funded, and, arguably the furthest reaching of the two approaches has, predictably, been the least politically oppositional: gradualism. From Keynes in 1945,

We look forward to the time when the theatre and the concert hall and the gallery will be a living element in everyone's upbringing, and regular attendance at theatre and concerts a part of organised education.

(Shaw 1987: 119)

to Shaw in 1987:

Politics and policies are only the means; the end is to improve the quality of the national life by making worthwhile experiences of the arts available to many more people.

(Shaw 1987: 16)

and beyond, into the 1990s, there has been a determination to take the broadly educational path in a way which reflects the practical suggestions of Beardsley's Theory of Aesthetic Justice. This approach endorses Beardsley's concept of aesthetic value and is a practical attempt both to distribute objects of aesthetic value homogeneously throughout society and to ensure equality of access to those objects for all.

By comparison, the aesthetic materialist approach is relatively unsung. It can be seen as an illustration of Beardsley's concept of aesthetic capability but extended to develop a notion of participation which raises people's expectations in a wider political sense. The aesthetic materialist approach is

also, broadly educative, but it is intended to lead to an inclusive normalisation of aesthetics, a state which reflects culture as an ordinary part of everyday life, not the possession of an élite. This expresses Williams idea that culture is 'not just for Lord and Lady Mink', that it is 'ordinary.'<sup>33</sup> This was outlined by John Phillips of the Paddington Printshop as follows:

There is no kind of pure aesthetics that can only be understood by an élite. Culture is everything. Everyone has culture. Yet our word for culture is only for the "cultured".

(Braden 1978: 1)

The adoption of this essentially political position, particularly during the 1970s led to the creation of a new breed of 'community artists' and to a significant questioning of the boundaries between social and aesthetic roles:

By the early 1970s the first "community arts groups" were being formed with, in a few cases, members of the community taking equal initiating roles alongside "professional" artists. ... a fundamental change was beginning - emerging from a new starting point which demanded *who* the "artist" really was.

(Braden 1978: 5)

## Gradualism

Beardsley's notions of aesthetic value and aesthetic wealth are, in effect, enshrined in the principal instrument of guidance available to the aesthetic judicial system - the Royal Charter of the Arts Council - which aims 'to

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<sup>33</sup> Williams used the word 'ordinary' in the sense of 'before everything else' and expressed the hope that education could be used to avoid the polarisation of our culture. When Margaret Thatcher, as Prime Minister, urged a broadening of the arts in 1989 The Guardian reprinted Williams views under the headline 'Culture is ordinary'. See Williams 3.2.1989.

increase the accessibility of the arts to the public.' This establishes a position which is founded on the notion that the arts are, as Shaw puts it:

... generally regarded as an enjoyable, rewarding, even civilising influence.

(Shaw 1987: 119)

It is possible to proceed from this position by citing, as Shaw does, 'countless studies' of audience composition, to the conclusion, not only that aesthetic injustice is rife, but also to a clear indication of what the cause has been and what the solution might be.

Too many ordinary people have been conditioned by their education to consider the best in the arts as "outside their reach".

(Shaw 1987: 120)

Surveys cited by Shaw<sup>34</sup> point, in his view, unequivocally towards education since they paint a picture of theatre audiences, in general, as middle class and well educated.

If advanced education correlates closely with people's patronage of the arts, it seems thunderingly obvious that any attempt to increase the accessibility of the arts must include the increase (and improvement) of education for the arts, that is the education of potential audiences ...

(Shaw 1987: 121)

Shaw's involvement with the Arts Council from 1973 onwards, drawing on his background as a professor of adult education, can be seen as a key instrumental component of the gradualist approach. He was largely

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<sup>34</sup> Shaw refers to 'Jennie Lee's White Paper' (1965); 'a survey commissioned by the Arts Council in the early 1970's' and 'a 1978 Mass Observation study of the audiences for three small-scale theatre companies, including the dedicatedly socialist 7: 84.' (Shaw 1987: 121)



responsible for instigating policy reviews which produced, ultimately, a strong growth of education and outreach work in the arts community.<sup>35</sup> However, the political objection, from the point of view of the aesthetic materialists, lies in the culturally élitist concept of the 'best of the arts' which the gradualists seem to take for granted must form the basis of their educative thrust. Shaw is the symbol of a kind of liberal aesthetic Utopianism, characterised as 'arts for all'. This, from an aesthetic materialist standpoint, makes too many assumptions about the nature of people's aesthetic circumstances. It takes Beardsley's argument a step further from aesthetic welfare towards the creation of an aesthetic welfare state which is in danger of being seen as prescribing cultural benefits for the masses.

## Aesthetic injustice

The aesthetic materialist approach to the problem of aesthetic injustice has three guiding principles.

- I. a Marxist understanding of the relationship between producer and consumer
- II. the need for what Kelly (1984) has called 'primary understandings' of community
- III. a recognition of aesthetics as part of a wide political spectrum.

I. Kelly, and Gooch (1984) argue, independently, that production and consumption, especially in the aesthetic domain, must be viewed as

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<sup>35</sup> See Chapter Three.

complementary if the public is to be engaged democratically in artistic production, even if only at a consultative, as opposed to a participatory, level.

According to Gooch:

If, for example, the Arts Council were to be democratised, it would first have to be recognised that it receives its money from the population as a whole but disburses it on behalf of the *state*, which is something entirely different. Under pluralistic political control, any state management of the arts has to recognise the interests of both producers and consumers.

(Gooch 1984: 64)

He goes on to argue that where local financial support is added to national funding the management policies of arts organisations should be 'seen and felt by local audiences to be of direct and immediate interest.' This, it is argued, would add an aesthetic dimension to existing financial accountabilities.

II. Kelly differentiates between *primary understandings*; knowledge and information which arises from participatory arts activity and *secondary understandings*; knowledge and information which is derived from the investigation of existing artistic objects. This second category covers most of the cultural actions proposed by the gradualists.

The argument is not about the benefit, or not, of reading poems which are 30, 40 or 70 years old; but the dubious assumption that this could, on its own, form a substitute for direct participation in the production of a living culture.

(Kelly 1984: 100)

For Kelly, the democratisation of culture is a paternalistic device which merely increases 'externally directed cultural consumption' that is, from his perspective, diametrically opposed to 'genuine human creativity.'

III. The two preceding principles of cultural democracy are founded on an objection to centralised state control, *per se*. The arts in the community, for Braden:

... have nothing to do with *appreciation* and everything to do with *social action*.  
(Braden 1978: 172)

Art movements, from the point of view of cultural democracy, are part and parcel of economic and political movements. According to Kelly, therefore:

Along with the demand for cultural democracy ... must come the demands for political democracy, for industrial democracy, for economic democracy. In each of these spheres, and in others, we should demand the freedom of citizens rather than the 'rights' of consumers.  
(Kelly 1984: 101)

There is a disparity between the levels of vehemence with which the cases for the gradualist and the aesthetic materialist approaches are stated. Cultural democrats, like Kelly, seem to need to argue passionately, from their perceived position as an embattled political minority, that the democratisers of culture, like Shaw, symbolise the overweening condescension of the patrician ruling class whilst Shaw, on the other hand, can point to the need to uphold aesthetic and artistic standards using the foundations of cultural eminence laid down by artists such as Dante, Milton and Shakespeare. However, even Shaw recognises the wider politics of the problem of aesthetic justice as he writes:

The fact that the serious arts are still accessible (which is different from being merely available) to only a small minority is a disgrace to a democratic society ... Not even a perfect Arts Council and an arts world wholly dedicated to 'arts for all' could overcome the socio-cultural barriers which in our still class-ridden society block access to the arts.  
(Shaw 1987: 146)

The reality has appeared somewhere between the two approaches as first, alternative theatre and, second, outreach, education and community work have developed between the 1970s and the present.<sup>36</sup> In the past twenty-five years, these ‘cultural interventions’, as Kershaw has termed them (Kershaw 1992), have, in some senses, brought together the two approaches to aesthetic injustice and turned them into what can be described as a new form of community theatre.

## Cultural interventions

Kershaw identifies four aspects of radical theatre as cultural intervention:

- experimentation in the 1960s represented by Arden and D’Arcy
- consolidation in the 1970s represented by McGrath
- reorientation in the 1980s represented by Ann Jellicoe
- fragmentation in the 1990s represented by John Fox

These lead towards his defining concept of ‘performance efficacy.’ This, he says, is:

... about the ways in which, in a particular historical period, theatre practitioners have tried to change not just the future action of their audiences, but also the structure of the audience’s community and the nature of the audience’s culture.

(Kershaw 1992: 1)

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<sup>36</sup> See Chapters Three and Four.

But, where Kershaw chronicles and critiques the hopes of radical theatre to act in a broad cultural interventionist fashion, Reynolds, who sees the issue as theatrical rather than societal, indicates that the challenges of the 1960s and 1970s need to be seen as challenges to what he describes as the 'closed community' of British professional theatre. He writes that:

... it seemed for a time ... that challenge was going to come from agit-prop and street theatre, and from so-called 'Alternative' theatre groups ... But, despite mounting what was, for a short time, an effective counter-culture, their impact on mainstream theatre was, at best, marginal.  
(Holderness 1992: 85)

In the context of this study, the historical dividing line comes almost half-way through Kershaw's outline history of alternative and community theatre with Ann Jellicoe's first community play in 1978 and the subsequent creation of the Colway Theatre Trust. This marked a new beginning in community theatre because of the scale on which Jellicoe worked and because of the ability of community plays to produce what Kelly calls 'direct participation in living culture.'<sup>37</sup> In terms of scale, Howard Barker's *The Poor Man's Friend*, the 1981 CTT play for Bridport, had 150 performers who, as Reynolds notes, were 'all given a specific role and not used merely for 'crowd scenes' (Holderness 1992:88). Each community play also involves a similar number of people in related activities thus having a significant impact on its chosen community.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> See Kelly 1984: 100.

<sup>38</sup> See Appendix 2 for the Colway Theatre Trust's 1995 estimate of the community penetration of their activity since 1978.

Arden and D'Arcy's experiments were comparatively small-scale and unsustained; McGrath's work, founded on agit-prop, mediated reality from a working class perspective but Jellicoe created something new - a potentially empowering form - which re-defined community theatre by putting the amateur participant at the centre of the process and making art which grew out of, and directly related to, its community. As Reynolds says:

...during the 1980s the work of one organisation in particular sought a genuine rather than a token involvement of the community in the process of play-making: the Colway Theatre Trust (CTT). By their work they have invited a re-definition and re-thinking of ideas about the community and its relationship to theatre.  
(Holderness 1992: 86/7)

## Community theatre since 1978

The recent history of community theatre can be seen as part of a reorientation from empathy with the community to the participation of the community in the creation of theatre. McGrath and 7: 84 created, with *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil*, and its successors, a theatre form which became important during the 1970s for its ability to synthesise and symbolise working class experience. The general importance of this, for Kershaw, lay in a Brechtian concern to empower the audience. For Reynolds, the new community theatre is paralleled with the 'triumph of democracy over autocracy'. This characterised the end of the 1980s because it centred around the evolution of a 'more enlightened and democratic theatrical form', the community play, which sought to create new levels of community participation in theatre. According to Reynolds:

CTT sought to break the conventional relationship of active producer and passive consumer, and to replace it with a more genuinely collaborative and mutually responsive enterprise.  
(Holderness 1992: 87)

In cultural interventionist terms the community play is a significant creation and a potent force in the move towards aesthetic justice. Participants in a CTT play show high levels of involvement with the process which show that they are combining with the professional arts workers who make up the production team to make theatre together, in community. They learn new skills and contribute stories and research to the play. There can seem to be a real sense in which the performance is being made communally with each participant, whether paid or unpaid, contributing what they can. This combination of activities leads to the suggestion that what is taking place during the two years of a community play project is very broadly an aesthetic materialist approach to the problem of aesthetic injustice. However, a look at the politics of community plays produces tensions in which Kershaw sees the potential for:

... a fundamentally dialectical form of efficacy for community play performance.  
(Kershaw 1992: 191)

### **Community plays: celebration or provocation**

The community play, as produced by Jellicoe and the CTT, sits within the general growth of participatory theatre practices identified by Kershaw. He locates this work alongside that of Boal, Barba and the British community arts

movement generally<sup>39</sup> as part of a move towards the primacy of social issues amongst community theatre companies which led to:

... the increased tendency to devise programming which matched particular shows to specific audiences.  
(Kershaw 1992: 183)

But it is in consideration of CTT's aims that the political contradictions emerge. According to Jellicoe, there can be no point in challenging the political *status quo* of a community, since, from her point of view:

Politics are divisive. We strongly feel that the humanising effect of our work is far more productive than stirring up political confrontation.  
(Jellicoe 1987: 122)

This is a liberal-humanist stance strongly reminiscent of the gradualist views of Shaw and one which, Reynolds argues, has the much longer antecedence of Matthew Arnold.<sup>40</sup> It allows Jellicoe to move to the humanist claim that community plays are instruments in community re-generation and to quote Kershaw in support of this view: 'community plays are a community-forming process'.<sup>41</sup> If this view is accurate then it would be reasonable to expect that, in respect of consonance between form and content, community plays would present themselves as non-oppositional celebratory events and, indeed, they can be viewed as such. Describing Barker's *The Poor Man's Friend* as enabling, Reynolds argues that:

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<sup>39</sup> See Kershaw 1992: 182 ff.

<sup>40</sup> See Holderness 1992: 94

<sup>41</sup> In the introduction to her book, under the heading 'What is a community play like?', Jellicoe says 'Here is a description of a small village community play as it was performed in Colyford, East Devon. Excerpts from an article in Theatre Ireland by Baz Kershaw.' (Jellicoe 1987: preface xv).



The play provided a focus and a reason for sustained community initiative which was both uniting and celebratory.  
(Holderness 1992: 89).

Whilst Kershaw, recognising that CTT were anxious about Barker's text,<sup>42</sup> indicates that they were employing a certain amount of cunning in locating a potentially explosive play inside a community play form because:

The celebratory, carnivalesque atmosphere which they create appears to eliminate day-to-day divisions: in this particular performative equation celebration equals community cohesiveness.  
(Kershaw 1992: 190)

However, Kershaw's case for the 'dialectical efficacy' of community play performance which might support an aesthetic materialist reading of the plays is argued on the basis of 'opportunities for subversive cunning in conservative communities.'<sup>43</sup> Community plays are, therefore, seen as the embodiment of a *potential for change* and must, in their early form, be viewed ultimately as an aspect of gradualism:

... we are not talking about revolution, of course ... but we are talking about a liberalisation of attitudes, a potential in community plays ... for producing emancipatory and egalitarian results, for reinforcing local democracy.  
(Kershaw 1992: 205)

As the form developed over the period between 1978 and the present it will be argued that, in some cases, an aesthetic materialist approach *has* become evident.<sup>44</sup> Community plays have a general empowering ability to place the participant at the centre of the process. In the light of this they can be seen as

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<sup>42</sup> Kershaw reports that Jellicoe '... was nervous of (*the play's*) progress into the public domain, because "I knew the town would throw it out if they realised what it was about".' (Kershaw 1992: 190)

<sup>43</sup> Kershaw 1992: 204.

a key aspect of the relationship between art and social action in the last twenty-five years; as embodying potential for cultural intervention and as an important contribution to the struggle for aesthetic justice.

## Summary

This chapter has outlined the hypothesis of the study, that we live in an aesthetically inequitable society and that participation in specific types of community theatre project can assist in the restoration of equity. It used a broad overview of art and social action from 1789 to the present day as a means of indicating certain changes in the nature of the relationship of the artist to society and related this to a Marxist analysis of social stratification and class consciousness. It argued that changes in the understanding of the way reality is mediated have led to an expansion of the potential subject matter for art. This has begun to move away from the iconography of the aristocracy and towards a desire to depict a more inclusive, less elitist world-view. In theatre the movement has been from the democratic, but simple, form of 18th century melodrama, via the apparent verisimilitude of Naturalism to an all-embracing late 20th century aesthetic.

In the light of these moves the aesthetic circumstances of contemporary society have been examined by the application of Beardsley's Theory of Aesthetic Justice. This has been linked with the notion of entitlement expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and a picture has been offered of contemporary society as aesthetically unjust. The move from private to public patronage of the arts, completed this century, has placed control of people's aesthetic circumstances in the hands of the state which exercises that control via an aesthetic judicial system. There have been two main approaches, within the aesthetic judicial system, to the problem of aesthetic injustice; gradualism and aesthetic materialism. This chapter has sought to bring together these approaches with, first, the notions of the democratisation of culture and cultural democracy, second, the differences between access and

participation, and finally, Beardsley's concepts of aesthetic opportunity and aesthetic capability.

Community theatre, since 1978 when the first Colway Theatre Trust community play was produced, has been examined for its potential as a cultural intervention. Community plays, because of their ability to involve large numbers of people in all stages and aspects of play production, have been represented as contributing to a positive move from the theatrical presentation of working class experience towards full participation of the community in playmaking. This blurring of the boundaries between professional and amateur is seen as a broadly educative process which is not only an aspect of art and social action but also a move towards aesthetic equity. Community plays are seen to offer, in Boal's term, a potentially liberating poetics which is both participatory and communal.

Community plays as a contribution to the creation of a more aesthetically just society raise three key issues:

- the nature of theatre as empowerment
- the potential of outreach activity
- the concept of people's performance.

These issues are the subject of the next three chapters which locate the specific concerns of the study in their particular social and theatrical context.

# 2

## Theatre and empowerment

Perhaps the theater is not revolutionary in itself; but have no doubts, it is a rehearsal of revolution!

Augusto Boal <sup>1</sup>

### Aesthetic spaces

Brecht and Boal, by offering a detailed critique of Aristotelian poetics, have developed new theories and styles of people's theatre. In different ways each of these practitioners moved forward the argument for a practice which sought to be genuinely empowering. They differ in two main ways. First, Brecht worked, in part, through improvisation to create *text for actors* whilst Boal focuses on theatre games and exercises which liberate the participants. Second, Brecht worked within mainstream theatre and offered a theory and

practice which aimed to revitalise the role of the audience whilst Boal desires to intervene in the actor/audience relationship in order to even out the power structure.

The spectator is less than a man and it is necessary to ... restore him to his capacity of action in all its fullness.  
(Boal 1979:155)

Boal, progressing his theory on Brecht's shoulders, takes another step, insisting that the spectator

... must (also) be a subject, an actor on an equal plane with those generally accepted as actors.  
(Boal 1979:155).

This chapter will first investigate the origin of Brecht's thought and work focusing on his Table of Differences between Dramatic Theatre and Epic Theatre.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, it will place the key theories of Boal in the context of Brechtian theatre in order to establish one of the developmental lineages of people's theatre: a line which has charted the class shifts of the century from the reflectionist performance of Naturalism to revolutionary or pre-revolutionary theatre. These origins will be used to analyse the mainstream theatre heritage of a new proletarian form - the community play.

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<sup>1</sup>Boal, *A Theatre of the Oppressed* London: Pluto press 1979: 155.

<sup>2</sup> According to Willett:... strictly speaking 'epic' is an Aristotelian term for a form of narrative that is 'not tied to time', whereas a 'tragedy' is bound by the unities of time and place. It is the same loose linking-together of events that we find in the Shakespearean history of the picaresque novel ... in German its meaning is a particular narrative form. (Willett 1967:168) Piscator is credited with evolving 'the first "epic" play, so initiating the style later developed for the Berliner Ensemble by Brecht' (Hartnoll:1972:416) Boal objects to the use of the word 'epic' saying that Brecht should have described his work accurately as Marxist poetics. See Appendix 3.

Community playmakers, both paid and unpaid,<sup>3</sup> seek to present a view of their world as being in flux rather than immutable and, as such, can be seen to be descended in a direct line through Boal from Brecht. As Boal says:

All these experiments of a people's theater have the same objective - the liberation of the spectator, on whom the theater has imposed finished visions of the world.  
(Boal 1979:155)

Brecht moved the aesthetic space from the stage area, hitherto sacrosanct for the actors, out into the auditorium. He set up an irreversible interaction between actor and spectator by making apparent and then demolishing the so-called 'invisible fourth wall' between stage and auditorium. Boal went further and developed practices which revealed and then eradicated the individual rather than structural division between actor and spectator. Post-Brechtian audiences are no longer able to remain in cathartic passivity. *Pace* Boal they must recognise their potential for action and, by engaging with the issues presented on stage, re-construct the performance as the first stage in an activist's journey towards combat with the 'cops' who control society. Boal's spectators find revealed, not the more obvious, external societal police but what Boal calls the 'cops in the head'. For Boalian practice the aesthetic space becomes the interface between actor and spectator. As Jackson, Boal's translator, puts it in the introduction to *The Rainbow of Desire*:

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<sup>3</sup> Although arguably united by this dialectical materialist standpoint there are nevertheless strong divisions between the professional arts workers who animate community plays and the participants who, largely, perform them. There has been a debate about the moral correctness of some of the terminology used to describe community playmakers and, since the issue comes down to financial reward, the terms 'paid' and 'unpaid' have been adopted thus promoting a broadly egalitarian approach and allowing the paid workers to indicate that they, too, give some of their time voluntarily.

There are cops in our head, they must have come from somewhere - and if they are in our head, maybe they are in other people's heads as well. Where did they come from and what are we going to do about them ?

(Boal 1995: xx)

Grappling with the same issues, community playmakers use devising techniques, performative strategies and theatrical conventions which extend Brecht's theory, or take it back, in some respects to Reinhardt,<sup>4</sup> and abolish the divisions of the aesthetic space allowing actor and spectator to mingle. They also have, in potential at least, the opportunity to use the Boalian methods of theatre and therapy to construct a performance which is of, by and for, its community thus making the aesthetic space and the communal space congruent. Just as there is no theoretical need in Boal's work for a division between actor and spectator there is, similarly, no need for a division in community playmaking between therapist and subject. The theatre process is the therapy and the community is both subject and therapist.

## Theatre for empowerment ?

Empowerment is a late twentieth century catch-all term applicable to political arts activity. It was coined in the late 1980s<sup>5</sup> when the political unity of the Left was weak.<sup>6</sup> The term is problematic for two main reasons. First, like

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<sup>4</sup> Max Reinhardt (1873-1943) Viennese director whose work influenced both Brecht and Piscator. See later in this chapter.

<sup>5</sup> It does not appear in the 1983 revisions to Williams, R (1983) *Keywords : a vocabulary of culture and society* London: Flamingo.

<sup>6</sup> Although the Left of the 1970s - 1990s appeared to need no external help to disable itself; its decline and subsequent period of revisionism took place when the Thatcher government, amongst whose aims was the eradication of socialism, was in power.

most critical descriptors, it is being applied post-hoc and therefore lacks the ideological force otherwise conveyed when practitioners categorise their own work. All the theatre workers who are discussed in this chapter have been, and some still are, engaged in political theatre the aims of which are empowering. As it has become less and less acceptable to use the term 'political' so the notion of a more general empowerment has found favour. Piscator, politicised initially by World War 1 when he was 20, said 'My calendar begins on August 4th 1914' (Piscator 1980: 7). He remained politically aware and, in 1929, wrote

The public ... is beginning to ask the theater ... for answers to political and social questions.  
(Piscator 1980: 323)

Second, the term empowerment is increasingly suspected of connoting condescension.<sup>7</sup> This latter concern, however, is a second-order consideration which colours the current debate but which does not prevent the useful employment of the term to describe some key defining aspects of this area of practice since about the turn of the century. Across Europe, as Modernism and Dialectical Materialism developed, the same concerns were identified, the same causes and ideologies challenged amongst others by Brecht and by the Workers Theatre Movement; and later by Dario Fo, by Theatre Workshop, by Augusto Boal and by John McGrath.

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<sup>7</sup> See footnote 3, this chapter for a discussion of the debate about so-called paid and unpaid participants in community plays.



## THEATRE: Brecht and text

Epic theatre addresses itself to interested parties who do not think unless they have a reason to.

Walter Benjamin (1977:16)

The dramaturgical developments which are currently grouped together under the heading of the evolution of Epic theatre can be appraised in a number of ways; as developments in theatre form, as political theatre and as a new view of theory and practice. Williams (1968) in a book which is a touchstone of twentieth century dramatic criticism, sets the debate in the context of the schism between theatre and literature: drama and the novel. He refers tacitly to the early nineteenth century decline of theatre as a socially acceptable art form by reporting the primacy of the novel but, nevertheless, turns towards an appraisal of theatre form by asserting that

... it is impossible to understand modern literature without ... a critical understanding of dramatic naturalism<sup>8</sup> (and) dramatic expressionism.

(Williams 1968: 1)

The first perspective, then, is the recognition of Brecht's œuvre in the context of broader formal trends in theatre. Williams located the discussion securely with the texts and dramaturgs themselves identifying the development of the 'modern' drama from the 1880/1890s with Ibsen, Strindberg and Chekhov and looking at Irish theatre then illusion, myth and poetic drama before turning finally to social and political drama. From this perspective Brecht's developments are seen as more parochial; of their time rather than as

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<sup>8</sup>The hidden term here is 'realism' and, although there is a minefield of disagreement over definitions, Gascoigne's 1962 preface to *Twentieth Century Drama* remains useful and clear. See Appendix 1 for the relevant extract.

transhistorical as, would perhaps, befit a grand theory. Brecht's opposition of 'dramatic theatre' with 'epic theatre' can be viewed as using the perceived faults of an 'Aristotelian practice' as a stick with which to beat the illusion of verisimilitude which is at the heart of naturalism.

... there is really no doubt, to any historian of the drama, that what is being attacked ... is the dominant naturalism of the European drama after Ibsen.

(Williams 1968:317)

Secondly, Brecht needs to be placed as part of a move towards a political theatre which, out of a need to make an explicit critique of society, almost automatically rejected naturalism. 'Political' here is being used in the twin senses of overtly agitational and propagandist and also of having a broadly left-wing social agenda. Williams describes this as a shift of emphasis from the 'subjective-critical' of naturalism (and, to a certain extent, of expressionism) to the 'objective-critical' of Epic theatre.

The isolated consciousness, seeing the world in its own way, had to try to become, to identify itself with, an objectively critical or revolutionary consciousness.

(Williams 1968:394)

In Williams' view the theatrical problem of objectivity - getting, in his terms, 'truly outside' - had two main solutions; that of irrationality and Pirandello

... a total criticism of the possibility of a knowable world: this is the centre of what is now called "absurdism" (Williams 1968:394)

and that of rationality and Brecht whose viewpoint

... is revolutionary and historical: the thwarting and destruction are shown, but are then explained, critically: a point of view is established, by what are now not techniques but conventions, and this viewpoint controls the drama.

(Williams 1968:394)

From this perspective there is a, possibly contentious, correlation between rational and Marxist. Brecht is seen to have created

... at root, a dialectical form, drawing directly on a Marxist theory of history in which, within given limits, man (sic) makes himself.  
(Williams 1968:317)

The difficulty here is in the nature of the image in which humans make themselves and a universal acceptance of the presentation of the Marxist image as the rational one. Speaking directly of *Verfremdung*<sup>9</sup> Gray says

Once the world is presented as strange, it must also arouse in the spectator the desire to alter it. His "epic" theatre thus becomes the implement of Communism, since he takes it for granted that the way in which spectators will want to see the world altered is the Communist way.  
(Gray 1961:60)<sup>10</sup>

The third perspective on the development of Epic theatre is that of its reappraisal of dramatic theory and practice and for this an acknowledgement of two of Brecht's theatrical influences, Max Reinhardt (1873-1943) and, more importantly, one of his disciples at the Deutsches Theater in Berlin, the Marxist director Erwin Piscator (1893-1966), is necessary. Reinhardt, according to Gray, was known for his ability to evoke atmospheres on stage and for an innovative dramaturgy which desired to bridge the gap between audience and actors.

... in a famous production of a miracle play he gave the impression that all were united in a single action. "The scene became a cathedral," wrote a contemporary observer, "and we were imprisoned

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<sup>9</sup>Analysis of Brechtian theory and practice has been dogged by confusing translations of this term. This study accepts Gray's view that it means 'making strange' and, for clarity, uses the single term *Verfremdung* to cover the V-Effekt, Alienation and the A-Effekt. See Gray 1961: 60.

<sup>10</sup>This comment must, however, be modified in the light of Brecht's revisions to both theory and practice, following the move away from *Lehrstücke*, presented in *A Short Organum for the Theatre* (1948). There is a discussion of this instrument later in this Chapter.

in the aisles, spectators on the stage itself.”  
(Gray 1961:61) <sup>11</sup>

As well as being an influence on Brecht this production style seems quite reminiscent of communal theatre's rediscovery and adoption of the promenade style of performance which puts actor and spectator side by side in scenes which flow across the performance space.

Piscator was a more profound influence and Brecht refers to him as 'without doubt one of the most important theatre men of all times' (Willett 1974:77). This was not only because of the origins of his practice in politics and the 'invention' of documentary theatre but also because of his introduction of several new adjuncts to performance. Working between 1991 and 1930 with the Proletarisches Theatre, at the Volksbühne and running the Theatre am Nollendorfplatz, Piscator brought together his ideas in 1928 in an adaptation which has been seen to be one of the significant productions of the modern theatre. *The Good Soldier Schweik*<sup>12</sup> featured all the new techniques and devices which were to influence Brecht's work. These were, to some extent, a Modernist product of the application of science to art since Piscator's machinery was developed following the electrification of stage mechanics. Brecht lists four innovations from this period and production which were designed expressly to allow the theatre to solve the problem of the

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<sup>11</sup>Gray is quoting a contemporary account from Stern E. & Herald H. *Reinhardt und seine Bühne* Berlin 1919: 106.

<sup>12</sup>A dramatisation of a novel about the First World War by Jaroslav Hacek.

presentation of 'modern events and themes' and which account for some of the similarities between his and Piscator's practice

- the use of film
- projections of documents
- moving platforms
- the elevator stage <sup>13</sup>

Film was conceived of as an additional super-actor and used as a scenic device designed to enliven the setting. The projection of documents allowed figures and statistics to be presented directly to the audience whilst the moving platforms and elevator stage could permit an actor to undertake an epic journey, such as Schweik's famous walk to Budweis, by actually walking for an extended period without leaving the point of command.

Some of the differences between Piscator and Brecht are revealed by their writings. Where Brecht focuses on the issues through the practice, Piscator foregrounds the political immediately. That Brecht evolved from Piscator seems to be confirmed by his mid-life reappraisal, *A Short Organum for the Theatre*. Where Piscator wanted to unify actor and audience in an affirmation of working-class solidarity, Brecht wanted a theatre where there was no possibility of an emotional connection between the spectator and the stage. He focused his concern for social empowerment and desire for dramaturgical change on a rejection of what he called Dramatic theatre which derived, in his

view, essentially from Aristotle's *Poetics* and which had adverse effects on the spectator who, by a cathartic process was

... purged of fear and pity and rendered a harmless member of society whose feelings were used up in the witnessing of purely theatrical events.

(Gray 1961:62)

Brecht is chiefly remembered for five things:

- The Table of Differences between Dramatic and Epic theatre
- The early didactic plays or *Lehrstücke*
- The 'Short Organum' which presents his revised theories
- The four great later plays <sup>14</sup>
- The establishment of the Berliner Ensemble

This chapter will concentrate on the first three of these legacies and the evolution of the epic acting style for their contribution to the development of communal theatre.

## The Table of Differences

The first full statement of Brecht's new ideas for theatre came, ironically, in the notes to the Brecht/Weill opera *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*

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<sup>13</sup>For a clear account of the 1928 production of *The Good Soldier Schweik* see Willett J (1986 Revised edition) *The Theatre of Erwin Piscator* London: Methuen pp.90-95.

<sup>14</sup> 1. Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder (Mother Courage and her Children)  
 2. Das Leben des Galilei (The Life of Galileo)  
 3. Der gute Mensch von Sezuan (The Good Person of Sezuan)  
 4. Der kaukasische Kreidekreis (The Caucasian Chalk Circle)  
 all written between 1937 and 1945 in exile from Nazi Germany.

<sup>15</sup>where he declared the need to 'renovate' the opera in general and listed nineteen points of innovation:

Opera had to be brought up to the technical levels of the modern theatre. The modern theatre is the epic theatre. The following table shows certain changes of emphasis as between the dramatic and the epic theatre;

DRAMATIC THEATRE	EPIC THEATRE
plot	narrative
implicates the spectator in a stage situation	turns the spectator into an observer, but
wears down his capacity for action	arouses his capacity for action
provides him with sensations	forces him to take decisions
experience	picture of the world
the spectator is involved in something	he is made to face something
suggestion	argument
instinctive feelings are preserved	brought to the point of recognition
the spectator is in the thick of it, shares the experience	the spectator stands outside, studies
the human being is taken for granted	the human being is the object of the enquiry
he is unalterable	he is alterable and liable to alter
eyes on the finish	eyes on the course
one scene makes another	each scene for itself
growth	montage
linear development	in curves
evolutionary determinism	jumps
man as a fixed point	man as a process
thought determines being	social being determines thought
feeling	reason

(Willett 1974:37) <sup>16</sup>

Brecht also produced a series of theatrical devices and conventions for the promotion of epic theatre which were strongly anti-illusionistic and actively prevented the audience from sinking into the spectacle of performance. In his

<sup>15</sup> The opera was presented as a Songspiel in 1927 but these notes date from the performance of the full version in Leipzig on March 9th 1930. Brecht's suggestions for musical innovation appropriate to opera follow, and rest upon, this first clear statement of the principles of Epic theatre.

<sup>16</sup> From this point in the chapter all the references which cite Willett 1974 are the words of Brecht himself rendered in translation by John Willett.

early period of experiment, at the Schiffbauerdamm Theatre in Berlin between the wars, the new style of staging required that the mechanics of the performance (stage lighting, sound effects) were visible to the audience; that there was strong lighting on the stage at all times; that the performers provided a distancing commentary on the action and, that projections of various kinds should be used to balance, complement and also to contradict the live action. His audiences were required to develop a new perspective on what was presented to them and to take some responsibility for their own theatrical experience.

In the twenties Brecht was concerned to avoid anything beautiful, lyrical, or directly moving. He denied emotion as he denied beauty ... only rational thought would serve to change the human situation as he saw it.  
(Gray 1961:64)

## **Acting style**

The means to this new perspective was *Verfremdung*, the act of making strange, and this led Brecht to overhaul acting style. The bourgeois actor of dramatic theatre *pace* Brecht immersed himself totally in his part but he required that actors cultivate the same distancing between themselves and their part as the audience was expected to adopt. He believed that the audience must have complete liberty to identify and categorise their feelings and to this end the Brechtian actor must 'show' the character to the audience rather than become the character for the audience. This change in the methods of the actor was inculcated by a combination of rehearsal practices



and structural devices in the plays themselves. Five rehearsal principles emerged. Actors were asked to

1. translate speeches into the third person
2. report their speeches by prefacing them with 'he or she said'
3. describe their actions in the past tense, as they were being performed
4. speak the stage directions
5. exchange parts

Within the plays themselves Brecht incorporated the repetition or duplication of events and characters, for example, the twin aspects of human character presented by Shen Te and Shui Ta in Der gute Mensch von Sezuan, and the balanced repetition of action in Der Jasager and Der Neinsager which is used a device to promote 'critical withdrawal' on the part of the audience. He also used narration and song, instrumentally for the advancement of *Verfremdung*, to interrupt, comment on or predict the action. These conventions are best exemplified by the *Lehrstücke* of the 1920s<sup>17</sup> which show Brecht contrasting epic and dramatic theatre and making clear the instructional purposes to which he intended to put epic theatre. Writing in *'The German Drama: pre-Hitler'*<sup>18</sup> he says:

Briefly, the Aristotelian play is essentially static; its task is to show the world as it is. The learning play is essentially dynamic; its task is to

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<sup>17</sup>Principally eight plays (i) Mann ist Mann (1924-6) A Man's a Man (ii) Die Heilige Johanna der Schlachthöfe (1929/31) St Joan of the Stockyards (iii) Der Jasager/Der Neinsager (1929/30) He Who Says Yes/He Who Says No (two plays designed to be presented together), (iv) Die Massnahme (1930) The Decision, later published as *The Measures Taken*, (v) Die Ausnahme und die Regel (1930) The Exception and the Rule, (vi) Die Mutter (1930/31) The Mother, (vii) Die Horatier und die Kuriatier (1933/4) The Horatii and the Curatii and (viii) Die Rundköpfe und die Spitzköpfe (1931/4) Round Heads and Pointed Heads.

<sup>18</sup>First published in *The New York Times* November 24, 1935.

show the world as it changes

(Willett 1974:79)

But, more importantly, and more clearly, he follows this by indicating that this 'theatre for instruction' had an almost pre-determined end-point. His Lehrstücke were intended to show 'how it (the world) may be changed' (Willett 1974:79).

## The Lehrstück or Learning Play

As the Table of Differences shows, Brecht rejected the enforced catharsis of Aristotelian dramatic theatre which he saw reflected in contemporary practice as a preconception of the audience

... not as a number of individuals but a collective individual, a mob, which must be and can be reached only through its emotions;  
(Willett 1974:79).

Standing up for his view that it was the nature of this sensationalist theatre which dulled the spectator's ability to engage in the ideas of a play and prevented the audience from facing the issues in a play, Brecht treated his public as 'individuals of mental and emotional maturity' (Willett 1974:79). He began to present didactic plays which, in his terms, re-invented the theatre as

... a place for ... such philosophers as not only wish to explain the world but wish to change it.  
(Willett 1974:80).

The Brechtian theatre of the inter-war Lehrstücke period was, according to Brecht himself, accessible to, and accepted by, a wide variety of people,

... philosophers discussed these learning-plays, and plain people saw them and enjoyed them, and also discussed them.

(Willett 1974:80).

The *Lehrstücke*, in a move which pre-dates the mass involvement of communal theatre work, were also, apparently, participated in by a large number of ordinary people.

*Versuch 12* was a learning play, *Die Massnahme*. Several workers' choruses joined in performing it. The chorus consisted of 400 singers while several prominent actors played the solo parts.  
(Willett 1974:80).

Brecht's exile from Hitler meant that his opportunity for production was limited but he used the time to write new work and to revise his theories. This mid-life re-appraisal and resulting change of focus surfaced, after an attempt to condense and publish the *Messingkauf*, as *A Short Organum for the Theatre* (Zurich 1947/8).<sup>19</sup>

### A proletarian aesthetic

The *Short Organum*, which consists of a prologue and seventy-seven numbered paragraphs, was a somewhat revisionist attempt to re-synthesise the aesthetic of Brechtian performance. Brecht's 1948 view was that the aesthetic needed to be properly, and fully, addressed in order to counter the theatre as 'bourgeois narcotics business' (Willett 1974:179). He sought to establish a proletarian rather than a bourgeois aesthetic. He had used the war years, when practice was impossible, to re-codify his theoretical approach,

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<sup>19</sup>Willett describes the origins of the *Short Organum* as follows: 'the new work seems to relate both formally and stylistically, to the *Novum Organum* of Francis Bacon' but also refers to Dr Reinhold Grimm's view. He 'suggests that Bacon's book attracted Brecht because it was directed against the

and decided to revise the propagandist aim, first set out in the Mahagonny Notes, of converting

... certain amusement establishments into organs of mass communication.  
(Willett 1974:179).

In what seems now to be an astonishing *volte-face* Brecht embraced the notion of theatre as entertainment, confounded his critics and simultaneously released his hold on the pre-determined alternative world view which the *Lehrstücke* had presented. The final section of the prologue to the *Short Organum* announces Brecht's intention to set the theory of *Verfremdung* in an aesthetic context and reads as follows:

Let us therefore cause general dismay by revoking our decision to emigrate from the realm of the merely enjoyable, and even more general dismay by announcing our decision to take up lodging there. Let us treat the theatre as a place of entertainment, as is proper in an aesthetic discussion, and try to discover which type of entertainment suits us best.<sup>20</sup>  
(Willett 1974:180)

Brecht's aesthetic proceeds from a profoundly Modernist re-evaluation of the effect of science on life and the development of mass production. He puts the Marxist argument:

The bourgeois class, which owes to science an advancement that it was able, by ensuring that it alone enjoyed the fruits, to convert into domination, knows very well that its rule would come to an end if the scientific eye were turned on its own undertaking.  
(Willett 1974:185)

Brecht concludes, firstly, that one of the results of the Industrial Revolution which 'deals with the character of human society' is a struggle between the

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*Organum* of Aristotle, Aristotle being, of course, not only the implied enemy of the non-Aristotelian drama but also the ideological villain of *Galileo*.' (Willett 1974:205)

rulers and the ruled and, secondly, that science and art come together as the twin controlling and ameliorating forces of life in that struggle or conflict, '... the one setting out to maintain, the other to entertain us.' (Willett 1974:185).

Brecht finally arrives at the key aesthetic questions - what should the products of art look like in this context ? and how should artists work ? He phrases it as follows:

What is the productive attitude in face of nature and society which we children of a scientific age would like to take up pleasurably in our theatre ?  
(Willett 1974:185)

The attitude Brecht suggests is an empowering one, an attitude which turns the function of art into that of making representations of human life or pictures of the world and, rather than prescribing the response and, hence, proscribing the audience, simply hands 'the world over to their minds and hearts, for them to change as they think fit' (Willett:1974:185). The agenda of the revised aesthetic is still one of social change but the framework is a more inclusive one. The function of *Verfremdung* has been adjusted to re-evaluate the potential change in the spectator. The case for drawing a parallel between Brecht's theories and communal theatre practice rests on this new 'free attitude' which locates the artistic potential for social change firmly with the proletariat. Brecht characterises the problem as a strong general need to 'evolve an art fit for the times' and proposed that this wish

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<sup>20</sup> It is, of course, entirely likely that Brecht had his tongue in his cheek here.

... must drive our theatre of the scientific age straight out into the suburbs, where it can stand as it were wide open, at the disposal of those who live hard and produce much, so that they can be entertained there with their great problems.

(Willett 1974:186)

In this somewhat romantic and sentimental expression, Brecht's 'children of the scientific age' are seen as needing an empowerment which can only be provided by the new theatre aesthetic since Aristotelian dramatic theatre, bourgeois theatre, has turned them, in his words, into a 'cowed, credulous, hypnotised mass.' (Willett 1974:188)

### **Is communal theatre epic theatre ?**

There are comparisons to be made between the *Verfremdung* of the inter-war years which leads to a single political response, and thereby to hoped-for action, and the post-war *Verfremdung* which leads to an 'aesthetic realisation' (wonder, awe, contemplation, exhilaration, grief). The contrast is between the didactic plays which pre-date Brecht's revisionist *A Short Organum for the Theatre* and the *Lehrstücke*, which are Communist propaganda. Brecht's later plays, especially the four great products of the period between 1937 and 1945, seem, by comparison, more general and less politically incisive. According to Williams, four key points emerge from the list of epic theatre principles and these drive a comparison with the process of communal theatre. First, in dramatic theatre the spectator is involved and unable to act whereas in epic theatre the spectator observes and is capable of action. Second, dramatic theatre presents an unquestionable experience where epic theatre

presents a view of the world which is open to critique. Third, in structural terms, dramatic theatre is a unified whole, a *Gesamtkunstwerke*,<sup>21</sup> where the action moves forward with an evolutionary inevitability whilst epic theatre, in a 'radical separation of the elements' of performance, is a montage of scenes which can stand alone thus allowing the action to progress by jumps. Fourth, and most important, it is axiomatic in dramatic theatre that the human being is a known, given quantity but in epic theatre humanity 'produces itself' during the course of the action.

The invitation which communal theatre extends to ordinary people relates very strongly to these four key principles. By becoming involved in a communally created performance the individual is stepping across the footlights into a world where they are 'able to act' (in both senses of the word) as opposed to remaining passively in the stalls. Involvement in the creation of an issue-based work of art invites the individual to confront a view of the world and formulate a critique of their circumstances. Thirdly, acceptance of the innovative dramaturgy of communal performance such as promenade style and non-naturalistic sequences allows for a revision of the view of the performance content as evolutionarily inevitable. Finally, at the level of personal development, the individual's view of themselves is challenged. Participation in communal theatre develops old skills and offers the

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<sup>21</sup>Literally 'total art work' - a description often applied to opera of which Brecht was writing in the Mahagonny Notes.

opportunity to acquire new skills. Communal theatre participants can be seen as producing themselves anew in the course of the process.

The creation of the Table of Differences, identified as a set of emphases or shifts of balance rather than as oppositions, marked the setting out of a new philosophy of theatre. This led to the identification of a set of theatrical conventions which re-evaluated the nature of the relationship between actor and audience. The spectator is valorised in ways which the later twentieth century would describe as empowering. The audience, standing for humankind, could, after Brecht, be identified as capable of learning from theatre the ability to avoid tragedy. The application of this to the performative strategies of communal theatre forces a re-phrasing of the question. It is not 'Does the theory apply to these circumstances?' but 'What is it that we now regard as tragedy?' As the British political agenda has moved towards the centre and begun to validate the individual, theatre workers, and particularly those involved in communal theatre, have not dealt with issues of world importance but have sought to empower at immediate and local levels. The issues facing such performance have been to do with how communities, perceiving themselves to be fragmented, use art to re-unite and what are the processes which allow us to deal with social and community problems from past and present.

Brecht's motivations in developing epic theatre and its devices were, over time,



firstly, to instruct the audience and, later, by means of providing an aesthetic dimension to the Marxist ideology of dialectical materialism, to awaken an enquiring response in the audience. This indication that, through the reaction between a thesis and an antithesis, a synthesis could be created which was at once a new perspective and also left the original opposites in dialectical tension, was clearly a politically-motivated strategy for the empowerment of the working classes. As such it paved the way for other re-appraisals of the social power of theatre in Great Britain such as the Workers Theatre Movement (1926-35), Theatre of Action (1934-6), Theatre Union (1936-42) and, ultimately, Joan Littlewood and Ewan MacColl's Theatre Workshop (1945-73).

### **Workers' Theatre: changing the British audience**

Propaganda plays were scarce in Britain before 1914 but there is evidence of the use of theatre for political purposes in the nineteenth century well before Brecht's ideas crossed the Channel. According to Samuel, the concept of political theatre was alive in Britain at the turn of the century (Bradby, James & Sharratt 1980) and he cites a further home-grown antecedent which dates from a stonemasons' strike during the building of the House of Commons in 1841:

... they hired the Victoria theatre for a benefit, and presented a dramatised version of their case.

(Bradby *et al* 1980: 213/4)

Such political dramatic activity as there was, although there are some lasting

monuments to it in the form, for example, of the People's Theatre in Newcastle upon Tyne (1911), seems largely to have been a combination of political education with the social functions of the broad Left movement. This was an evangelistic activity which, to a certain extent, seems to have derived from needs such as the unification of the party membership and fundraising through such activities as choral singing and drama. In the 1920s, amongst other organisations, the co-ops '... sponsored hundreds of drama classes and theatrical troupes' (Bradby *et al* 1980: 215).

These local initiatives <sup>22</sup> were the seed bed in which, during the 1920s, other, wider influences were felt, from groups which were further left and also from troupes such as the Blue Blouses<sup>23</sup> in Russia. The Workers' Theatre Movement (WTM) built upon foundations laid by groups such as the Hackney Labour Players, the Lewisham Red Players, the Salford Red Megaphones, the Greenwich Red Blouses and the Streatham Red Front. The WTM because of its political stance became the focus for a clear and specific debate about the class struggle rather than a more general concern with pacifism.

It belonged to the Communist rather than the Labour wing of the movement; it was concerned with agitation rather than entertainment, and addressed itself to specific issues rather than the "social question" generally. Theatrically, it turned increasingly from "naturalistic" drama to agit-prop ... and attempted to

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<sup>22</sup>For a detailed description of the national picture prior to the formation of the WTM see Samuel R. *Workers' theatre 1926-36* in Bradby *et al* 1980:218-219.

<sup>23</sup>According to Innes 'Agitprop theatre originated in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution as a substitute for newsprint, to spread information and the party-line through a widely dispersed and largely illiterate population ...' and the Blue Blouses were '... an offshoot of the Russian Institute of Journalism.' (Innes 1992:72).

exchange indoor performances for the theatre of the street.  
(Bradby *et al* 1980: 216)

Post-war German expressionism, which also influenced Brecht with its use of montage and its rejection of bourgeois art forms, was brought to bear on the desire to construct a proletarian aesthetic. In the *locus classicus* of the WTM, *The Workers' Theatre* (1930), Ness Edwards indicated that it was, in his view, possible to rescue the drama for the working classes and to harness the power which had hitherto been used for the benefit of the Catholic Church, the Guilds and the ruling classes. In an argument which presages the development of communal theatre he wrote

No longer will it be confined to a professional clique, no longer will it be merely an entertainment.  
(Edwards 1930:39)

The *Co-operative News* supported this view in 1927:

Ultimately the theatre may become similar in outlook to the Moscow Arts Theatre, and present plays under conditions which will make community drama possible.  
(Bradby *et al* 1980: 218)

## **Dialectic realism - the X-ray picture of society <sup>24</sup>**

The strength of the WTM's ideology - 'all art was propaganda and the theatre itself a splendid weapon of struggle' (Bradby *et al* 1980: 221), and its structure as a loose federation of regionally-based, locally-sensitive groups did much to create a new theatre of ideas. In Salford, James H. (Jimmy) Miller (later to change his name to Ewan MacColl), had joined the Clarion Players in 1929 and founded the Red Megaphones, whose slogan was 'a propertyless theatre

for a propertyless class' in 1931. He began to develop what Goorney describes as 'a form of instant theatre'.

The Group performed short sketches against the hated Means Test to dole queues outside Labour Exchanges ... To keep pace with an ever changing situation ... sketches written in the morning were performed to the afternoon dole queues.

(Goorney 1981:2)

On the arrival in 1934 in Manchester of Joan Littlewood, the Red Megaphones were to transform themselves first into the Theatre of Action and subsequently into the Theatre Union. Both these latter troupes issued 'manifestos'<sup>25</sup> which, along with their performances, revealed not only their stance but also the similarity of their ideology to that of Brecht. Manifesto items such as the following could have come directly from the *Short Organum*.

The Theatre of Action realises that the very class which plays the chief part in contemporary history ... is debarred from expression in the present day theatre.

(Goorney 1981:11)

Both Brecht and the members of Theatre of Action began work as political activists using theatre didactically and instrumentally for class purposes. Gradually, over time, they shifted their emphasis until they became theatre workers concerned not only to keep their working-class focus but also to develop theatre form. Thus from an early history of supporting strikes and playing at factory gates MacColl and Littlewood had apparently moved towards attempting to save the theatre itself.

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<sup>24</sup>Tom Thomas *Daily Worker* 8 February 1930, p.11. Cited in Bradby *et al* 1980: 221.

<sup>25</sup> See Appendices 4 and 5 for the detail of these manifestos.

The Theatre Union says that in facing up to the problems of our time and by intensifying our efforts to get at the essence of reality, we are also attempting to solve our own theatrical problems both technical and ideological. By doing this we are ensuring the future of the theatre...

(Goorney 1981:25)

MacColl, in particular, recognised the constraints of agit-prop and wanted, as did Brecht, to evolve a new theatrical form which was adaptable to the contemporary political and social climate.

As the WTM, generally, flourished during the 1930's, Theatre of Action which had become Theatre Union, moved towards performances which brought agit-prop elements to classic drama. The decision to stage Lope da Vega's Fuente Ovejuna <sup>26</sup> was influenced by the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.

... it was decided that we should mount a production which would have the dual function of drawing public attention to the struggle of the Spanish people against Fascism and raising funds for medical aid.

(Goorney & MacColl 1986:xl)

This marked, not only a change of theatrical direction for MacColl and Littlewood <sup>27</sup> but was also a key moment in the history of people's theatre.

The demise ... of the WTM in 1936 ... corresponds to a much more general change in the cultural and political climate.

(Bradby *et al* 1980:224)

The WTM, having made its platform the class struggle, had to revise its views during the mid to late 1930s because of the rise of Fascism and the consequent

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<sup>26</sup> Fuente Ovejuna (The Sheep Well) was staged in 1936.

<sup>27</sup> MacColl continues: 'It was our first excursion in the field of classical drama, the beginning of a road that was to lead to Marlowe's Edward the Second, Marston's Dutch Courtesan, Arden of Faversham, Volpone and Macbeth.' (Goorney & MacColl 1986:xl)

appearance of the Popular Front. The Popular Front was a broad left coalition against Hitler which saw Communist groupings realigning with centre left organisations in a new mobilisation of class forces against a common enemy.

The Popular Front marked the end ... of the revolutionary epoch in European Communism; artistically it was associated with the rise of "socialist realism" in the Soviet Union and a decisive rupture between communism and experimental art.

(Bradby *et al* 1980:224)

Where the WTM was a permanent casualty of the Second World War, Littlewood and MacColl's work, which had continued until 1942, re-appeared re-vitalised after the war like Brecht's theatre. MacColl recalls that, having had no doubt that they would re-group after the war, the company was re-named and began a new phase of work.

This new company we called Theatre Workshop since we intended that it should be both a production unit and a training school where new approaches to acting could be tried out.

(Gorner & MacColl 1986:xlix)

Although the organisation was new and there was a determination to be paid for their work, the nature of the theatrical experiment and the search for a popular, proletarian theatre which, in some ways, paralleled Brecht, remained constant.

As far as we were concerned experiment was merely a part of our social and political commitment; it was a tool which would make the theatre more capable of dealing with the reality of the world we were living in. Our emphasis on a working-class audience was part of that reality.

(Gorner & MacColl 1986:xlvi)

Theatre Workshop existed in two main phases; as a touring unit and as a building-based company. In the period 1945-1953 it toured nationally and

internationally and was based successively in Kendal, Middlesbrough, Manchester and Glasgow. At Kendal, like so many of its predecessors, Theatre Workshop produced a manifesto,<sup>28</sup> described by MacColl as 'ambitious, even pretentious', which re-stated their aims of striving for a proletarian aesthetic and is reminiscent of Brecht's desires to utilise technical and scientific advances and to create a radical *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

Theatre Workshop is an organisation ... (whose) ... purpose is to create a flexible theatre-art, as swift moving and plastic as the cinema, by applying the recent technical advances in light and sound, and introducing music and the "dance-theatre" style of production.

(Gorner 1981:42)

Foregrounding, as it does, the use of music and dance, Theatre Workshop's manifesto not only pre-figures the way in which the company was to develop at Stratford but also points to a link with the communal theatre of the 1980's and 1990's. The connection with Music Hall is, for Innes, the defining aspect of the Britishness of Littlewood's theatrical legacy.

By contrast to Bolt's melodramatic morality-play version of Brechtian drama, Joan Littlewood evolved a theatrical form that duplicated Brecht's aims, while avoiding his methods. Instead a familiar British model<sup>29</sup> was adapted in a way that made it a home-grown equivalent.

(Innes 1992:128)

The touring period culminated with the move to the Theatre Royal, Stratford East in 1953 and the partial realisation of Littlewood's dream of theatre as 'fun-palace'. From taking their theatre to the people on tour the company moved to London and developed a kind of responsive relationship with the

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<sup>28</sup>See Appendix 6 for the complete text.

<sup>29</sup>The model referred to is Edwardian Music Hall.

local community.<sup>30</sup> This relationship, which involved theatrical developments derived from Music Hall, contributed to a new kind of radical stage musical which, in turn, can be seen as an antecedent of some aspects of communal theatre.<sup>31</sup>

### **“Spectator,” a Bad Word! <sup>32</sup>**

The evolutionary line traced by this chapter from Germany and Russia in the early part of the century to Stratford, East London between 1953 and 1973 identifies not only the lineage of a people's theatre but also places it firmly in the context of professional art. Whatever their class origins and sympathies, Brecht and the British Brechtians made theatre for presentation to working-class audiences. Although they wanted to show the working-class point of view in ways which encouraged the spectator subsequently to take action they were content to maintain the distinction between actor and audience. This distinction has been blurred by the work of Augusto Boal whose ideas were first publicly presented in 1974 <sup>33</sup> with the publication of *Teatro de Oprimido* (Theatre of the Oppressed). Boal's view is that all experiments in the creation of a popular, proletarian or people's theatre proceed from the same desire:

- the liberation of the spectator, on whom the theater has imposed finished visions of the world. And since those responsible for theatrical performances are in general people who belong directly or indirectly to the ruling classes, obviously their finished images will be reflections of themselves. The spectators in the people's theater (i.e. the people themselves) cannot go on being the passive victims of

<sup>30</sup>See Chapter 3 for a discussion of the post-1968 evolution of this idea in the work of The Combination.

<sup>31</sup>See Chapter 7 for comment on form and content in the community play.

<sup>32</sup>Boal 1979:154

<sup>33</sup>First published in English in 1979.



those images.  
(Boal 1979:155)

## EMPOWERMENT: Boal and devising

Aristotle proposes a poetics in which the spectator delegates power to the dramatic character so that the latter may think and act for him. Brecht proposes a poetics in which the spectator delegates power to the character who thus acts in his place but the spectator reserves the right to think for himself, often in opposition to the character.

(Boal 1979: 122)<sup>34</sup>

Moving from Brecht to Boal is potentially a shift from the ersatz to the genuinely heuristic. Boal not only re-sites the aesthetic space but his work also marks a move away from a practice which is focused on rehearsed performance and its reception towards a practice which is centred in improvised performance and its reception. Brecht and the British Brechtians concentrated on liberation through an ideological transaction. This implied that they, the theatre workers in an omniscient fashion, had already identified a problem which afflicted the working class and had brought their skills to bear on the construction of a work of art which could symbolise the problem. The reception of this work would, in theory, sow the seeds of action in the spectator which would, in due course, lead to the solution of the problem. Boalian practice steps back from the specificity of the problem for, as he indicates, 'local groups have to work out their own oppressions and solutions.'

<sup>35</sup> His work consists currently <sup>36</sup> of a series of improvisatory and devising techniques and forms of presentation which, principally, comprise:

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<sup>34</sup>This section is given in full in footnote 40.

<sup>35</sup>Boal, at the 1982 IATA Conference in Villach, Austria cited in Griffin 1982/3:8.

<sup>36</sup>According to Jackson:

- Forum Theatre
- Image Theatre
- Invisible Theatre
- The Joker
- The Cop in the Head
- The Rainbow of Desire

These techniques do not distinguish between actor and audience and are designed to empower the spectator to become a ‘spect-actor.’<sup>37</sup> The distanced role of the Joker where ‘help is given with techniques but never with content’ (Griffin 1982/3:8) has the function of opening the political stance way beyond the comparative simplicity of class versus class. It reveals a more general opposition between ‘individual or group’ and ‘oppressor’ which can be represented as follows:

Working class	Ruling class
Individual/group	Oppressor

This has led to some problems in the transfer of Boal’s work from South America although Boal is clear from the beginning of *Theatre of the Oppressed*

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Forum Theatre is the foundation-stone for the new, as yet undeveloped Legislative Theatre: as a newly elected member of the Rio Chamber of Vereadores ... Boal is using Forum as a tool for communities to suggest laws ... which his theatre groups then take back to a lawyer to be drafted into formal laws ...’ (Boal 1995:xix)

<sup>37</sup>According to Schutzman and Cohen-Cruz  
‘Spect-actor refers to the activated spectator, the audience member who takes part in the action. In TO (Theatre of the Oppressed) there are meant to be no passive spectators; Boal emphasizes the potential involvement of even those who do not physically participate, and the fact that they at least have the choice.’ (Schutzman & Cohen-Cruz 1994:238)

that his stance is Marxist.

This book attempts to show that all theater is necessarily political, because all the activities of man are political and theater is one of them. Those who try to separate theater from politics try to lead us into error - and this is a political attitude.

(Boal 1979:ix)

As Jackson has pointed out there has been much discussion of the ways in which Boalian practice could assist outside the context of an overtly oppressive regime.<sup>38</sup>

Boal's Forum Theatre workshops were frequently asking if the work could deal with oppressions where there was no visible, tangible, present oppressor. ... people ... found it less easy than peasant groups ... in Brazil ... to synthesize their experience of the world into the sort of Manichean equation suggested by the terms 'oppressor' and 'oppressed'.

(Boal 1995:xix)

These difficulties have produced the techniques known as the *Cop in the Head* and the *Rainbow of Desire*.<sup>39</sup> Of the six principal Boalian techniques the remainder of this chapter will concentrate on Image theatre, Forum theatre and the concept of the Joker in order to examine their use in the development of communal theatre.

Boal's theory has three origins; a critique of Aristotle; a critique of Brecht and the application of the ideas of Paulo Freire to theatre. Boal's first statement

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<sup>38</sup>Boal's work is rooted in his own life in Brazil and Argentina where as Schutzman and Cohen-Cruz document:

'In 1971, having continued to work in opposition to the military regime, Boal was arrested at the Arena Theatre, and subsequently jailed and tortured. After three months he was released with the warning that if his political actions resumed he would not survive a second arrest. He moved to Argentina where he resided until 1976.'(Schutzman & Cohen-Cruz 1994:3)

of the Poetics of the Oppressed, '*Experiments with the People's Theater in Peru*,' reports a series of activities undertaken in 1973 as part of *Operación Alfabetización Integral*, (ALFIN) a national literacy programme. Freire's book *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) outlines the power of literacy to combat oppression. The ALFIN project was set up to apply these principles to adult illiteracy in Peru and had two main aims:

- 1) to teach literacy in both the first language and in Spanish without forcing the abandonment of the former in favour of the latter
- 2) to teach literacy in all possible languages, especially the artistic ones, such as theater, photography, puppetry, films, journalism etc. (Boal 1979:121)

Boal's application of Freire's principles involves a democratisation of theatre and theatre skills which empowers 'the people' to change the action of the drama and is his outline of

... the various experiments we made in considering the theater as a language, capable of being utilized by any person, with or without artistic talent. (Boal 1979:121) <sup>40</sup>

Changing the action of the drama is seen by Boal as the precursor to real action and as a genuine transfer of power.

... all the truly revolutionary theatrical groups should transfer to the people the means of production in the theater so that the people

<sup>39</sup>These Boalian techniques are documented in detail in Boal A.,(1995) *The Rainbow of Desire*, London & New York: Routledge.

<sup>40</sup>Boal goes on to make a clear distinction between Aristotelian, Brechtian and his own practice: 'Aristotle proposes a poetics in which the spectator delegates power to the dramatic character so that the latter may act and think for him. Brecht proposes a poetics in which the spectator delegates power to the character who thus acts in his place but the spectator reserves the right to think for himself, often in opposition to the character. In the first case, a "catharsis" occurs; in the second, an awakening of critical consciousness. But the *poetics of the oppressed* focuses on the action itself: the spectator delegates no power to the character (or actor) either to act or think in his place; on the contrary, he himself assumes the protagonic role, changes the dramatic action, tries out solutions, discusses plans for change - in short, trains himself for real action.' (Boal 1979:122)

themselves may utilize them. The theater is a weapon, and it is the people who should wield it.  
(Boal 1979:122)

**Transforming the spectator into an actor**

From Boal’s opening position that the theatre is a language to be learnt, he identifies that ‘the first word of the theatrical vocabulary is the human body, the main source of sound and movement’ (Boal 1979:125). His theory therefore rests on a plan to make ordinary people fluent in that language with the aim of becoming transformed ‘from object to subject’ by control of the skills of the theatre. According to Boal the spectator must evolve ‘from witness to protagonist’ and there are four stages of evolution which Boal lists<sup>41</sup> as follows:

First stage	Knowing the body - exercises to explore the limitations and possibilities of the body
Second stage	Making the body expressive - games to promote self-expression through the body
Third stage	The theatre as language First degree - Simultaneous Dramaturgy Second degree - Image Theatre Third degree - Forum Theatre
Fourth stage	The theatre as discourse - a series of simple theatrical forms in which the spect-actor creates ‘spectacles’

Stages one and two mirror a series of common practices both in acting training and drama in education which derive originally from Stanislavsky (Griffin 1982/3:4) and which were developed by the Method School of Lee Strasberg in

<sup>41</sup>See Boal 1979:126 for the complete description of the stages.

New York and by key drama in education practitioners such as Brian Way who, in the late 1960s wrote:

We cannot use number to solve interesting problems until we have experienced and to some extent mastered number itself: no more can we use drama to understand or experience history or bible stories or literature until we have experienced and mastered certain basic aspects of drama itself. Ultimately, drama is a valuable tool, but first the tool itself must be fashioned.  
(Way 1967:7)

### **Theatre as language: the devising process**

It is at stage three of the spectator's evolution that Boal's innovation becomes apparent. He begins to outline a set of principles which roughly equate to the process of devising performance and have been instrumental in the development of post-Colway models of communal theatre. At stage three there are three degrees of transition in the move from witness to protagonist. Boal's concept of 'simultaneous dramaturgy', the first degree of theatre as language, is a halfway house between the passive and the active spectator where verbal solutions to a moment of crisis are invited from the audience and the actors continue the scene taking these into account.<sup>42</sup> The second degree of transition is Image Theatre, a silent exercise, where a participant uses the bodies of some of the group to make a 'photograph', a still image of a theme or problem. A discussion ensues and two further images are 'sculpted'.

... in the first grouping the actual image is shown, in the second, the ideal image. Finally he is asked to show a transitional image, to show how it would be possible to pass from one reality to the

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<sup>42</sup> 'Simultaneous dramaturgy: the spectators "write" simultaneously with the acting of the actors.' (Boal 1979:126)

other. In other words, how to carry out the change, the transformation, the revolution, or whatever term one wishes to use. (Boal 1979:135)

The third degree completes the transformation of the spectator into spectator. This is Forum Theatre where 'the participant has to intervene decisively in the dramatic action and change it.'<sup>43</sup> This activity is the most distinctive change that Boal has wrought and it can be seen that the whole nature of the activity is radically different from anything previously encountered in the development of a people's theatre. Forum Theatre sessions straddle the boundary between theatre performance and classroom teaching in ways that the best participatory programmes of Theatre in Education can. Boal has created a new theatre of discussion and experiment which is, of necessity, a visceral, as opposed to a purely cerebral, experience. In this theatrical forum, all present have the option to make verbal and/or acted-out suggestions for the solution of the problem under consideration. It is not only immediate, focused and concentrated but it makes the demands on the spectator which Brechtian practice can only hint at. In Boal's view, Forum Theatre avoids catharsis.

The truth of the matter is that the spectator-actor practices a real act even though he does it in a fictional manner ... Within its fictitious limits, the experience is a concrete one ... the rehearsal stimulates the practice of the act in reality. Forum Theatre ... evokes ... a desire to practice in reality the act he has rehearsed in

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<sup>43</sup>Boal says:

'The procedure is as follows: first, the participants are asked to tell a story containing a political or social problem of difficult solution. Then a ten- or fifteen-minute skit portraying that problem and the solution intended for discussion is improvised or rehearsed, and subsequently presented. When the skit is over, the participants are asked if they agree with the solution presented. At least some will say no. At this point it is explained that the scene will be performed once more, exactly as it was the first time. But now any participant in the audience has the right to replace any actor and lead the action in the direction that seems to him the most appropriate.' (Boal 1979:139)

the theater. The practice of these theatrical forms creates a sort of uneasy sense of incompleteness that seeks fulfilment through real action.

(Boal 1979:141/2)

## The Joker

Boal's invention of the Joker, a facilitator, or rather a 'difficultator'<sup>44</sup> whose function is to challenge, can be thought of as a cross between the *neutral chair* and a teacher in role. The Joker System originates from Boal's earlier work between 1956 and 1960 with the Arena Theatre in São Paulo, Brazil. It was refined and developed in the same theatre between 1968 and 1971. Working within a performance-based company, Boal wanted to pursue some Brechtian ideas and look at ways of separating the actor from the character and at techniques for the simultaneous presentation of a play and its critique. The Joker System ...

... is characterized by the mixing of fact and fiction, the shifting of roles during the play so that all actors play all characters ... and the introduction of the "joker" figure, both a narrator who addresses the audience directly and a "wild card" actor able to jump in and out of any role in the play.

(Schutzman & Cohen-Cruz 1994:237).

The Joker,<sup>45</sup> who operates in workshops as opposed to performances, as distinct from the Joker System, is a cross between a workshop leader and a ringmaster. This is a developmental rather than performative use of the concept more suited to participation than to presentation.

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<sup>44</sup>According to Jackson:

'Forum never seeks to impose any kind of doctrine of political correctness, nor to make things easy; easier to understand, maybe. The joker's function is not that of facilitator, the joker is (in Boal-speak) a 'difficultator', undermining easy judgements, reinforcing our grasp of the complexity of a situation, but not letting that get in the way of action or frighten us into submission or inactivity.' (Boal 1995:xix/xx.)



## The liberation of the spectator

In the search for a popular, or proletarian theatre Boal's work represents a significant theoretical advance on that of Brecht. It also marks an important change in the theatrical context of this work. Where Brecht worked in a pre-determined performance space to subvert aspects of the mechanics of performance which would otherwise disable his ideological intentions, Boal changed the nature of the performance context. In developing the notion of a personal transformation for the spectator he produced an empowering structure which recalls the cultural principles not only of Freire but also of Armand Gatti whose views are expressed by Knowles as follows:

Everything turns on writing ... to acquire the ability to write is to acquire culture ... without culture a man is without an identity, but it must be one's own writing, one's own culture, not an alien culture which can only reduce those on its fringe to silence.  
(Knowles 1992:124)

The implicit empowerment here lies in the personal, individual nature of the culture desired and in the emphasis on language which recalls Boal's concept of simultaneous dramaturgy.

In the context of communal theatre in the 1980s and 1990s both Brecht and Boal have been of prime importance. Brecht has contributed a theatrical superstructure on which communal performance has depended both in theory and practice *for its product*. Boal, in parallel with the ideas and practice of

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<sup>45</sup> 'In forum theatre, the joker sets up the rules of the event for the audience, facilitates the spectators' replacement of the protagonist, and sums up the essence of each solution proposed in the

the community theatre groups spawned by the counter-cultural movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, has provided a focus on the individual participant and a series of dramaturgical activities which have enriched *the processes* of community playmaking.

## Summary

This chapter began by being suspicious of the word empowerment, raising the possibility of condescension. It went on to indicate that, in many ways, some of the key theatre theorists of the twentieth century have been grappling with exactly this issue. Piscator and Brecht in the 1920s linked politics with theatre in an attempt to reconstruct the image of the audience. They wanted to make people think as a prelude to taking action. The effects of this have created a British Brechtian tradition which encompasses the Workers Theatre Movement and Theatre Workshop. This strand of mainstream theatre development has contributed a new ideology and set of performative structures which have been utilised by the makers of communal theatre. Concerns with literacy as an empowering tool and with the notion of theatre as a language, especially through the work of Boal in South America, have centred on a new theatre of discussion and experiment which aims to turn the spectator into an actor. This concept has been picked up and made central to the communal theatre tradition by activities such as community soundings.<sup>46</sup> As well as having influenced the performance style of communal theatre with his concept

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interventions.' (Schutzman and Cohen-Cruz 1994:237)

of Image Theatre,<sup>47</sup> Boal's work is clearly central to the process of communal playmaking because he uses devising techniques to focus on the issues for the participants. This way of working has been used by those communal theatre practitioners who have sought to move on from the Colway model of community playmaking.

Brecht and Boal are the main theoretical protagonists of a movement towards what Kershaw has described as 'performance efficacy.'<sup>48</sup> The effects of their thought on communal theatre can be seen, in parallel with those practitioners that Kershaw discusses in detail, as

... part of a major structural change in British theatre, and the effort to break free of the traditional constraints on production and distribution (which) led to an impressive variety of policy, programming and aesthetics.  
(Kershaw 1992:243)

Community playmakers are part of an empowering tradition of proletarian theatre which, standing on the shoulders of Brecht and Boal, seeks to share the control of both process and product with the participants. This attitude has been summed up by Dario Fo as follows:

... talking about popular theatre, theatre for the masses, means refusing to have our plays organised by public institutions.  
(Fo 1985:137)

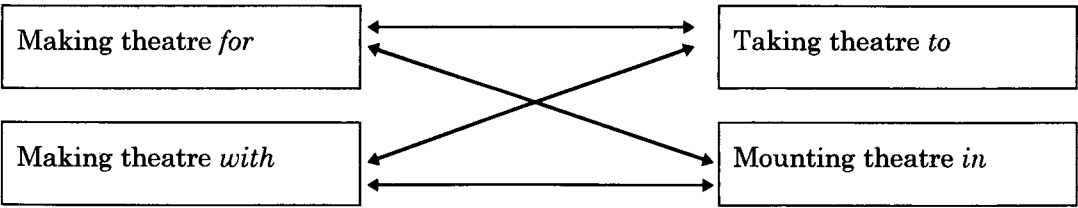
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<sup>46</sup> This method of identifying the issues for a communal performance is used by Jon Oram and further discussed in the conclusion.

<sup>47</sup>No grand claims are being made here. Image Theatre, of course, is only one aspect of the general renaissance of physical and visual theatre which has occurred during the same period that community plays have been made.

<sup>48</sup>'Performance efficacy: the potential that the immediate effects of performance may have to influence the community and culture of the audience, and the historical evolution of wider social and political realities.' (Kershaw 1992:257/8)

This de-institutionalisation in the name of cultural education and empowerment has taken a number of forms which have been represented by Kershaw with this grid:



(Kershaw 1992:244)

Placing contemporary communal theatre practitioners on the grid requires that this chapter’s investigation of the roots of communal theatre within mainstream theatre is conditioned by an investigation of the ways in which education and theatre have attempted to address the notion of putting the participant at the centre. Chapter Three therefore examines a range of contexts for outreach which have been developed since the 1960’s.

# 3

## Reaching out to the public

A serious job of disempowerment has gone on, not just culturally but politically and socially ... It has left us with our political culture in tatters. We're in a sort of wasteland, where people have got to start recreating the world. <sup>1</sup>

Trevor Griffiths

### The development of outreach work

Griffiths' rueful comment in 1994 could have been describing the national picture in the late 1960s. It is ironic that thirty years later one of the country's most eminent political dramatists could apparently discern no lasting effect of the new ideas and animations which were largely brought about by the social and political changes of the events of 1968. This chapter looks at the ways in which notions of responsiveness to context and community have been

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Bignell 1994: 55

addressed in recent performance practice since the appearance of the 1960s counter-culture and at the ways in which attempts have been made to identify and dismantle the perceived barriers between actor and audience. International freedom movements and the events of May 1968 are a key influence here not least because they spawned the community arts movement, which is the subject of chapter four, “People’s performance”.

The first set of barriers to be broken were those of (i) participation versus presentation and (ii) de-mystification of the arts in general. The second set of barriers to be broken were those which kept formal education apart from formal theatre. Taking the arguments for the so-called ‘de-mystification’ of the arts, producers of performance began to look for ways in which process could be made available to their audiences who had hitherto been viewed only as passive consumers. This resulted in the growth of a range of contexts for what became known as outreach work which attempted to open up the apparent mystery of performance to the audience and which, inevitably, blurred the boundaries between education and the arts. Artists developed the skills of teachers and education, in its broadest sense, became an integral part of performance work. This chapter then looks at the history, organisation and rationale of the three main contexts for outreach:

- TIE companies
- amateurs
- education work in arts centres.

There is a detailed literature of some of these areas and it is not the intention of this study to replicate that in any way. Rather the need is to re-examine the existing literature from the point of view of the contribution of these activities to the notion of aesthetic justice with an eye to the developing phenomenon of the community play.

The chapter concludes with the establishment of links between the notions of empowerment propounded in chapter two and the work of outreach groups within the mainstream of theatre performance. It also raises the issue of differences between participation related to product (outreach) and participation, either for its own sake (self-expression, learning new skills) or for reasons connected with political empowerment (community arts practice in theatre).<sup>2</sup>

### **Context and community**

1968 was a historic year which politicised a lot of people. Rarely can one year be singled out as an isolated turning point, but in the case of 1968 so many events coincided on a global scale that it clearly marked the end of an era in a historically unprecedented fashion, and the beginning of equally unprecedented political consciousness and activism.

(Itzin 1980: 1)

For many the focus of the anti-Vietnam war demonstrations was symbolised by Tariq Ali's encouragement to develop a critique of the establishment. This was taken to heart by theatre workers some of whom, focusing on the question of who theatre should be for, started companies which began to tour to venues

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<sup>2</sup> See also Chapter Four "People's performance".

which had previously not hosted performance. Others, fired by the question of what theatre should be for, took their work to the heart of the community and began to make work which took the issues of the locale as its artistic starting point.

A new generation of British dramatists <sup>3</sup> appeared from the cultural and political ferment of 1968 in just the same way that the previous generation <sup>4</sup> had appeared from the post-war loss of national confidence <sup>5</sup> and had been affronted by the Suez crisis. Unlike, in particular, Arden, Bond, Osborne, Pinter and Wesker, whose work had been centred on the English Stage Company at the Royal Court theatre and the Theatre Royal at Stratford East and who have been described as part of the '*first theatre revolution*' (Craig 1980:11), the new writers were able to disseminate their work across the country because, like the earlier Theatre of Action, they took to the road. <sup>6</sup>

A new set of needs had been identified, needs which, from the viewpoint of the Left in the late 60s and early 70s could be partly satisfied by the establishment of a circuit of new receiving houses <sup>7</sup> which would, amongst

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<sup>3</sup> In particular, Howard Brenton, David Edgar, Trevor Griffiths and David Hare.

<sup>4</sup> This "generation" can be represented by John Arden, Edward Bond, John Osborne and Arnold Wesker.

<sup>5</sup> Christopher Innes, however, links the appearance of these dramatists with earlier influences - the depression and World War 2 itself, rather than its aftermath. See Innes 1992:179.

<sup>6</sup> This is, of course, a generalised view. Just as it is possible to argue that the theatrical events of 1968 were foreshadowed and, in one sense, enabled by, in particular Jim Haynes and the Traverse as early as 1963 (see Itzin 1980:9-12) it is also necessary to realise that writers such as Arden had been working on the fringe more or less successfully, for some time.

<sup>7</sup> Craig (1980:14) cites Peter Ansorge:

It is impossible to deny ... a link between the most publicised political events of 1968 and the creation ... of the new 'alternative' circuit of arts labs, cellar theatres and environmental venues. (Ansorge 1975: 56)



other things, give access to hitherto deprived audiences. Craig describes the beginnings of the fringe and the ultimate creation of the Arts Council's Touring Grid as being driven by three types of demand:

To restore theatre to its traditional position of importance by re-creating a fresh, unsullied language of theatre; to extend the social basis of theatre to include the working class, the oppressed and the dispossessed; and to make obvious the enjoyment and the possibility of creation - particularly, collective creation - as something neither mysterious nor the privilege of the elite few but the democratic right and the inherent human capacity of the many.

(Craig 1980: 9/10)

The first stage in this emancipation was preoccupied with the balance between form and content and the consequent rejection of naturalism that has been common to politically-motivated theatre this century. As Bull has indicated, the new drama needed to be 'able to present at very short notice the enactment of a particular situation to an identifiable audience' (Bull 1984: 2). However, as chapter two attempts to demonstrate, disillusionment with agit-prop style began to cause re-grouping and fragmentation. As Bigsby has identified '...within a decade this ... had been infiltrated by a degree of doubt which turned ideological assurance into ontological insecurity' (Brown 1984: 164) at the same time as some companies were trying to be locally responsive and wanting to make their work from within the same geographical community rather than touring to geographically disparate communities of interest. Innes, citing David Edgar, reveals the nature of the re-thinking that was seen to be needed:

When the actors, having shown yet another great working-class defeat, stand with clenched fists singing a song about how it'll be

alright next time' that 'is the moment when many people crawl under their seats with embarrassment.  
(Innes 1992: 181)

For many writers of this generation, the context was what needed to be changed and they began to retreat from agitprop and to aspire to place their work on the country's main stages. In 1975 Howard Brenton wanted to see his plays in bigger theatres because they represented a more public forum which would formally establish his worth as a playwright.<sup>8</sup> The issues were those of form and content combined with the strategic penetration possibilities of both of larger venues and of other media. Brenton, Edgar and Hare are the key figures in the move into main houses and according to Innes:

In 1968 the political situation had seemed as clear as the struggle for democracy against fascism in the 1930s but it had become increasingly obvious to some that caricature and slogans failed to match social reality.  
(Innes 1992: 181)

Edgar's response was to develop a proto-Social Realism via plays like Destiny (1976). Others, like Hare, moved their work wholeheartedly into main houses and film. Some, like Griffiths, continued to work in small and large scale theatre as well as seizing whatever opportunities came their way for television exposure. A few, like McGrath, kept absolute faith with their original commitment to agitprop.

Companies and individuals who took the other alternative road and explored their ability to relate their work to their community were equally in tune with

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<sup>8</sup> See Theatre Quarterly Vol. V, No. 17 (1975).

the spirit of 1968 for, as Khan has written, 'the late sixties saw not only the development of the fringe but also the beginnings of community theatre' (Craig 1980: 59). However, these developments had also been prefigured, as Khan indicates, by Lindsay Anderson <sup>9</sup> as early as 1957.

In some measure, community theatre practice evolved from the existence, or not, of a performance base or other building to work in and from. According to Gooch two sorts of activity are identifiable (Gooch 1984). Companies who concentrated on a small area - one district or town and 'whose theatres are based in a particular locality and who see as an important part of their work the generation of a geographically local culture' (Gooch 1984: 181) and touring companies which were able to cover a large area such as a whole county and who saw 'a large part of their job as expressing the interests and concerns of people in their area' (Gooch 1984: 9) However, when examining this period of the history of community-responsive arts activity it is necessary to overlay Gooch's analysis with a matrix which discriminates by scale and type of activity. It is then possible to identify a pattern which includes the work of individuals such as Cheeseman, Wesker and Arden/D'Arcy as well as The Combination, The Half Moon, Bruvvers, Solent People's Theatre and Avon Touring.

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<sup>9</sup> Khan cites Anderson's 1957 article in *Encore* which called for 'a new conception of the relationship between art and audience, a total change in the cultural atmosphere.' See Craig 1980: 59.

The new movement, from Littlewood onwards, described by *Encore* as 'Vital theatre',<sup>10</sup> seems to find a focus with Lindsay Anderson's 1957 call to arms which raised the need for new relationships. 'The development of a new kind of theatre is intimately bound up with the development of a new kind of audience' (Craig 1980: 59) and it can be seen to run chronologically through Arnold Wesker's Centre 42 and John Arden/Margaretta D'Arcy's anarchic carnival in Kirbymoorside to Peter Cheeseman's documentary work at Stoke<sup>11</sup> before the re-politicisation of the late 1960s. Craig recognises this and says: '1968 was in many respects a lift-off year for alternative theatre but, like all earthquakes, it was preceded by a number of warning tremors' (Craig 1980:18), and similarly identifies both the problem and the main protagonists (Arden/D'Arcy and Wesker):

... though the 'Royal Court revolution' had changed the content of plays, the Janus problem of the context of theatre and the audiences for theatre remained untouched.

(Craig 1980: 18)

The post-1968 community responsive developments were spanned by the practice of, for example, The Combination, who were influenced by Jim Haynes and whose evolution, according to Itzin, 'exemplified the development of politically committed community theatre' (Itzin 1980:322). The company transformed itself, as Khan puts it, from 'fringe theatre to campaigning

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<sup>10</sup> Cited by Khan in Craig 1980: 59.

<sup>11</sup> Anderson's piece for *Encore* appeared in 1957. The ideas behind Wesker's Centre 42 date from the 1960 TUC Congress. Centre 42 initiated 'a series of festivals in regional towns and cities' (Kershaw 1992: 106) in 1961 and 1962. Arden/D'Arcy's Kirbymoorside 'Public Entertainment' took place in 1963 and Cheeseman masterminded the creation of a theatre in the round in Stoke-on-Trent in 1962, beginning the Stoke documentaries in 1964. See Craig 1980, Itzin 1980 and Kershaw 1992 for further detail.

touring group to community theatre company' (Craig 1980: 61) over a period of approximately thirteen years.<sup>12</sup> The move of The Combination from Brighton to London in 1971 is loosely described by Khan as 'a response to their audiences' (Craig 1980: 61) but it seems to have been of much greater significance, certainly from the perspective of this study because of the nature of the relationship between the company itself and the venue. In an interview with Khan, The Combination described themselves as:

... trying to build young popular theatre for an audience without higher education and the whole bourgeois cultural heritage.  
(Craig 1980: 64)

They chose The Albany because it was 'not an arts centre but a community focus in an area deprived and wrenched apart by the Blitz' (Craig 1980: 61)

The problematic relationship between the company and some of the writers it employed together with the company's perception of its target audience are problems which are identical to those which have re-surfaced in the community play tradition. Itzin comments that the parting of the ways between The Combination and Howard Brenton was to do with the relationship between process and product.

... after a while he (Brenton) decided that he wanted to write plays for theatre audiences. We were more interested in the *process* and the young people coming in. (Itzin 1980: 324)

A member of the company describes the problems of class and ownership:

I never wanted the audience to be the classic working-class audience ... we wanted the kids in jeans and sweatshirts, not miners. ...

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<sup>12</sup> Founded in Brighton in 1967 as an alternative theatre company it moved to London and worked from The Albany Empire as a touring group. In 1978 its work as a community company, and the Albany itself survived a fire set, some say, by a fascist terrorist organisation. See Itzin 1980:320-329.

That's what The Combination was about really - creating a place that people could feel was their own.  
(Itzin 1980: 324)

The differences between Ann Jellicoe's Colway Theatre Trust model of community play animation and subsequent developments together with the fundamental problem of the 'external' nature of the community arts worker are written into those memories of The Combination's work. To a certain extent Khan is right to characterise this as an aspect of the age-old two cultures problem.

This dichotomy presents an unenviable dilemma for both 'artists' and 'people'. Community theatre (and community arts) is attempting to create a third alternative ...  
(Craig 1980: 68)

This invocation of Braden's terms (artists/people)<sup>13</sup> gets to the heart of the relationship between theatre and its community. The recognition of the context as a defining construct is central to the creation of new ways of working. As Khan says, this can

... take two broadly different directions - one in which the artist participates much more fully in his/her local community; the other in which the community participates much more fully in the creation of art.  
(Craig 1980: 68)

Outfits like The Combination, and many others throughout the 1970s and 1980s, pursued the first course of action making work which arose from the live issues of the community in which they were based. Others like Medium Fair and Telford Community Arts made a new body of, what Dario Fo would describe as *teatro da bruciare*, - throwaway theatre, by working with as well as

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<sup>13</sup> See Braden 1978.

for their communities. Proceeding from the issues of current concern for their community they made work which used theatre as a weapon for politics, expression and growth.

## Education and performance

The relationship with the audience remained a prime consideration and during the 1980s three sets of binary oppositions were fundamentally re-examined. They were

Participation	:	Presentation
Theatre	:	Education
Process	:	Product

In the light of the new understandings about the nature of context and community these oppositions came to be seen not as dialectical tensions but as continua and the proving ground for this new thought became the interface between education and the arts as the Arts Council of Great Britain indicated when reviewing its 1983 education strategy:

In embarking on that strategy, the Council had in mind that, in addition to making the arts more accessible in financial and economic terms, it was important to do what it could to help break down the less tangible and attitudinal barriers to the arts sometimes created by such factors as social class and lack of educational opportunity. Education has a vital part to play in ensuring that the arts are enjoyed and fully understood by a wider public.

(ACGB 1984a: 19)

This view was, later that year, promulgated in the A.C.G.B. Education Bulletin:

The extent and quality of education work is now one of the Arts Council's prime criteria for assessing the work of its revenue clients.

(ACGB 1984b: 2)

The realisation that arts educators shared a common perspective on these binary oppositions with many theatre workers produced a flurry of activity at the margins of both professions. This was a laudable development which was, to a certain degree, problematic because the considerable success of the new area of work was itself marginalised by prejudices expressed from within theatre.

This may well be due to the low status of children in our society, coupled with a lack of understanding as to what an actor/teacher is (somebody who can do neither job fully ?). Whatever the reasons, TIE is often seen as being only “half-theatre”, presented by people who would be unable to get a job in “proper” (i.e. adult) theatre.  
(A.C.G.B. undated [ii])

The arrival of Sir Roy Shaw as secretary-general of the Arts Council in 1975 was a significant catalyst since he brought considerable experience in adult education to the post and began by applying an educational perspective to the Council's first Chartered duty which was ‘to develop and improve the knowledge, understanding and practice of the arts’ (A.C.G.B. undated [I]). He instituted a review which ultimately resulted in the creation of the Council's first policy statement on education. At the time of the review there were only two initiatives which could be described as overtly educational. Professional writers were being encouraged to work with young people under the ‘Writers in Schools’ scheme and certain repertory theatres were funded to support Theatre in Education companies. In 1978 the Arts Council Education Unit was set up <sup>14</sup> and it produced a remarkable expansion in education-related

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<sup>14</sup> The unit initially consisted of one officer whose brief was to liaise between education and the professional arts in order to promote co-operation between the two sectors in developing a new kind of relationship. Its aims (see Macdonald 1982:2) described a low-key approach more to do with research than development.



activities by professional artists. The 'Writers in Schools' scheme was used as a blueprint for developments across the arts and many theatre, opera and dance companies appointed education officers. Most important in this expansion was the creation of a new kind of relationship which this study argues can be seen as a series of attempts to counteract aesthetic injustice.

### **Theatre-in-education companies**

TIE companies are characteristically groups of trained actors who tend to adopt a collective approach to their work, which might consist of a performance with a separate session of improvisation by the children within a framework set by the company.

(Hutchison 1981: 141)

Unlike other forms of community responsiveness, Theatre in Education (TIE) is almost invisible. This was true even when arts funding was much more secure than the present time and the exigencies of the Local Management of Schools had not conspired to make visits to schools by outside professionals very difficult to support financially. Teams of actor-teachers who presented their work during the school day to closed audiences of pupils could be forgiven for having a low profile outside the education service.

Developing from, and in some senses based upon, the pioneering drama in education work of Peter Slade and Brian Way,<sup>15</sup> TIE was, in part, produced by the liberalisation of formal education and the concentration on the learning needs of the individual which began with Rousseau, was built upon by Dewey and Piaget, and gained real momentum in the 1960s.

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<sup>15</sup> See, in particular, Slade 1954, Slade 1958 and Way 1967.

Now the change which is coming into education is the shifting of the center of gravity ... the child is the sun about which they are organised.

(Dewey 1959: 34)

There was a strong move to place the child at the heart of the learning experience and to account for each child's individuality. As Entwistle has pointed out, 'In social and political terms we believe that the individual counts' (Entwistle 1970: 26). Teachers were looking for new and stimulating ways of approaching the curriculum and experiments were being conducted into mixed-ability teaching, discovery methods and co-operative working. New understandings of the heuristic value of the problem-solving approach to education, at a time when national economic circumstances permitted of educational expansion and development, were used to promote drama in education and, by extension, the development of this new form of learning theatre. As England wrote in his 1990 survey of theatre for young people:

General awareness of the claims of young people increased and the pop world paid homage to young experience and to youthful spending power. Child-centred education gathered momentum and a congruence of the boom in drama in education and theatrical provision gave rise to theatre in education.

(England 1990: 21/2)

If liberal education was one parent, the other, according to Coult, was repertory theatre. He compares the birth of TIE with the emergence of the 'underground' theatre movement, commenting that despite the respectable parentage of TIE, it eventually became a potentially radical force in education:

...this decent, liberal child of mid-sixties idealism has become honed into what, at its best, is a clear-headed, sharp-witted dialectical theatre for young people - a true inheritor of Brecht's political aesthetics.

(Craig 1980: 76)

Jackson's authoritative study, *Learning Through Theatre*, reinforces the view that TIE arrived at a time when a number of social, political, theatrical and educational forces were converging.<sup>16</sup> He draws together a series of influences which span the century while Robinson (1980), concentrating on the period 1965-1980, makes the point that education and theatre are inevitably interconnected.

TIE is just one aspect of a general movement both in the arts and in education over the last fifteen years or so. This is based on *a recognition that the arts have particular social functions*, not as cultural decorations, but as ways of expressing and communicating values and ideas. TIE has refused to be classified as either theatre or education and rightly so. It is an attempt to blend the two *at the point where their social functions overlap*.

(Robinson 1980: 86)<sup>17</sup>

During the late 1960s TIE spread across the country from an early project at the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry in 1965. There is an uncanny symmetry as far as this study is concerned between this and the developmental work on community plays done at the same theatre nearly thirty years later. Coult reports the innovation as follows:

The first new post-war repertory theatre was the Belgrade at Coventry, and its director was Tony Richardson. Together with Gordon Vallins, a teacher employed by the theatre to forge links with schools, he envisioned and brought into being the very first Theatre-in-Education team. It seems clear now that the establishment of the team had as much to do with theatre policy towards the community (or simply theatre public relations) as to any clearly defined educational priorities.

(Craig 1980: 77/8)

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<sup>16</sup> See Jackson 1980: pp.vii - xix for a full account. Appendix 7 quotes the most relevant section.

<sup>17</sup> My emphasis.

Vallins <sup>18</sup> fleshes out the account from first hand experience, citing Joan Littlewood and Brian Way as formative personal influences - 'the important thing I learned from Brian was that drama, used as an educational tool, could be central to the development of the individual' (Vallins 1980: 4). Vallins also indicates that Tony Richardson was of key importance in the development of what was to become TIE:

He noticed that they (children) played out the basic stories and conflicts of the plays seen and often worked out problems in terms of games and story. He recognised the educational potential in children acting out problems. (Jackson 1980: 4)

Richardson wanted the theatre in general and the Belgrade in particular to 'make a more direct contribution to the life of the community' (Jackson 1980: 5) and subsequently instigated a policy which would, through contact with the city's schools, increase young people's awareness of what the theatre could offer. This quasi-marketing exercise developed a number of previous initiatives and, via a re-birth of the Young Stagers, created first the Belgrade Youth Theatre and, ultimately a children's theatre company. As Vallins comments:

From its inception the policy of the Belgrade had been to interest young people in its activities. The roots of TIE may be discerned in this policy and TIE may, in fact, be regarded as a culmination of the Belgrade's programme of provision. (Vallins 1980: 6)

The link between theatre and education had actually been forged at the theatre's inception by a statement in the City of Coventry Handbook which enshrined one of civic duties of the Belgrade as needing to have:

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<sup>18</sup> See Jackson 1980: 2-15.

... regard to the desirability of assisting the council in its capacity as the Local Education Authority in the development of an appreciation of drama in the schools of the city.

(Jackson 1980: 9)<sup>19</sup>

As the pilot project evolved it moved further and further away from the idea of educational activity as a marketing strategy for the theatre itself. Vallins indicates that the team did not want to focus simply on the business of audience development but declares that they were:

... attempting to use techniques of theatre in the service of specific educational objectives.

(Jackson 1980: 13)

The team invented the term 'actor/teacher' and created a form which replicated itself rapidly in many repertory theatres. In 1965 the Arts Council of Great Britain set up an enquiry into theatre for the young and its report, published in 1967, identified 12 companies which were working in this area.<sup>20</sup> Five of the companies were receiving grant aid and the report, by recommending an injection of £90,000, validated the concept and produced a spurt of activity. As England's 1990 survey indicates, the success of TIE across the country was such that there were soon 'TIE teams attached to repertory companies and increased efforts on the part of the reps themselves to make contact with schools' (England 1990: 26) and, six years later, in 1973, 'well over half the regional rep theatres were doing some kind of TIE work' (England 1990: 31).

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<sup>19</sup> See Appendix 8 for the details of the original proposal.

<sup>20</sup> See Appendix 9 for the complete list.

Defining TIE is a tortuous activity which involved the Standing Conference of Young People's theatre in numerous subdivisions. The general area of Theatre for the Young can be subdivided three ways into:

- youth theatre
- children's theatre and
- young people's theatre.

The last can itself be split into educational theatre and theatre in education<sup>21</sup> with the principal difference being that educational theatre is presented to a school/youth audience purely in the form of a play, possibly to a large audience, where theatre in education is utilitarian in that 'its primary aim is to use theatre and drama for educational purposes i.e. to teach about something other than theatre or theatre skills' (England 1990: 2)

We aim to look at the reality of the world in which we all live and through our theatre help our audience to understand it by raising questions about it and about themselves in it.  
(Gould 1985: 44)

Gould's statement of the principal aims of the Leeds Playhouse TIE company demonstrates, not only the development of the form since its inception in 1965, but also the policy correlation between TIE and more general community arts work and community plays in particular. TIE programmes picked up on the social climate of the time and began to take contemporary issues as the starting point of their work.

The industrial confrontations of the 1970s gave increased substance to the movement as more and more emphasis was put on performing programmes which brought class and industrial politics to the fore.

(A.C.G.B. undated [ii])

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<sup>21</sup> See Appendix 10 for a full description of these terms.

There is a strong parallel here between the development of TIE and the intellectual currents apparent in alternative theatre in general. Bradby and McCormick relate this, in particular, to the small-scale nature of the work and cite the title of a key book of the period, 'Disrupting the Spectacle': 'By this phrase Peter Ansorge meant overcoming the feeling of being "plugged into history"' (Bradby & McCormick 1978: 162).

Getting to the heart of the activity of TIE, O'Toole looks at the nature of its key feature, participation, and identifies three types of involvement: extrinsic, peripheral and integral.<sup>22</sup> He centres on integration as representing the identifying feature of TIE indicating that it 'involves real power for the children to make of the experience what they will' (England 1990: 24). Clearly, from this analysis and from the policy of Leeds Playhouse TIE team, empowerment lies at the heart of the TIE agenda. Airs, in his 1994 survey for North West Arts, identifies the key learning opportunities of TIE:

This sort of learning is about making sense of significant events on stage, events which become metaphors for experiences we have had ourselves. As we watch or take part our own lives are clarified. We make connections. We see the patterns.  
(Airs 1994: 18)

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<sup>22</sup> England, Alan op.cit. (1990) p.88. The full definitions are:

1. Extrinsic: where the element of participation is separated from the theatre activity.
2. Peripheral: where the audience is invited to contribute in order to add to the theatricality without affecting either the structure and the nature of the play or its basic function as audience.
3. Integral: where the audience perspective becomes also the perspective of characters within the drama, especially when the audience members act as well as being acted upon. The structure of the dramatic conflict, the audience's relative position to it, and therefore the total experience are altered. The element of theatre is no longer central.

He also updates the educational concerns in the light of the National Curriculum and the Local Management of Schools. He describes six areas of value beyond the issue-based content:

- speaking and listening opportunities
- design and technology opportunities
- drama and theatre studies opportunities
- music
- physical education
- economic and industrial awareness opportunities

(Airs 1994: 20-21).

Although, as Airs' analysis indicates, the ideological heart of TIE has remained reasonably constant, its survival as a form is endangered. 'LMS has made the central funding of companies by the local education authority less and less feasible' (Airs 1994: 24). One of the seven companies supported by North West Arts has ceased to operate since Airs' report was compiled.<sup>23</sup>

From small beginnings in 1965, by 1976 the form was already developing beyond schools and into the community, as HMI noted in Survey 22 *Actors in Schools*:

It emerged that many YPT companies had begun to incorporate theatre for the community at large in their output.  
(D.E.S. 1976)

In the 80s and 90s Government re-organisation of school financial management has threatened the continuing existence of TIE companies but



many of their ideals and some of their working practices have been adopted by community artists and community play practitioners in ways which support the notion of empowerment and advance the cause of aesthetic justice through theatre.

## Animateurs

Outside the community arts movement, this area of community responsiveness is specific to a single arts discipline being almost exclusively the province of dance. This may be explained in some respects by the nature of the discipline and the existence of a discrete and concrete set of skills and competencies which can be taught *ab initio* and in relatively large groups. However, as the funding figures would support (see the table below) it may be taken to represent an attempt to raise the status of dance nationally in comparison to the other performing arts and to drama in particular. The greater the levels of participation the greater the awareness of, and potential need for, performance product and associated activities. This was certainly true between 1974 and 1984, a period roughly coinciding with the rise of the animateur movement, as the Arts Council of Great Britain noted in The Glory of the Garden, their strategy for the development of the arts in Britain 1984-1994:

... both classical and contemporary dance have enjoyed a striking upsurge in popularity over the past decade ... the national audience for dance now exceeds that for opera.  
(A.C.G.B. 1984: 14)

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<sup>23</sup> See Appendix 11 for the list of TIE companies surveyed by Airs' report.

Dance has for some time been the relative Cinderella of arts expenditure and the evangelism of the amateur movement together with the popularity of dance classes and the crossover into sport and health (jazzercise, aerobics etc.) may be seen as components of a more general proselytisation and an attempt to make the art form more widely available rather than as a specific attempt to counteract an aesthetically unjust society. The following figures, taken from two sets of the Annual Report and Accounts of the Arts Council of Great Britain relate to the two years when the amateur network was reported on formally.

1986/7	Spending on Dance	£3,583,266.00
	Spending on Drama	£11,746,495.00
1993/4	Spending on Dance	£20,969,000.00
	Spending on Drama	£40,650,000.00

Table: Arts Council of Great Britain - grants by art form 1986/7 & 1993/4

The fact that there was a seven-fold increase in amateur posts between these dates indicates, whatever other factors were in play, that considerably increased dance animation and, presumably, public awareness was reflected in national funding allocations. As the figure above shows, in the accounting category of 'Grants by Art Form' in 1986 Arts Council expenditure on Dance represented 30.51% of the Drama expenditure. By 1993 it had reached 51.58% and showed a 21.07% erosion of the funding differential between the disciplines in favour of dance. In an expansion which would have pleased Sir William Rees-Mogg, there were certainly more people walking through this

part of the arts garden to enjoy the flowers.<sup>24</sup> Horticulture rather than haughty culture.

The pattern of growth in this area has been incremental and typical of minority arts activity in this country in that, from small beginnings, the principle of networking resulted in the creation of specific support and lobbying organisations which, in turn influenced policy and funding both nationally and locally. This activity, however, went largely unremarked outside its own sphere of influence and, for ten years there was not felt to be a need to evaluate it nationally. There have subsequently been two reports, Glick (1986) and Peppiatt and Venner (1993) and a handbook for animateurs. As Glick identifies in her evaluation, in 1976 the first three posts and two residencies were established and, five years later, the Arts Council of Great Britain formally identified seed funds for animateurs. In the same year (1984) as the publication of *The Glory of the Garden* the first animateur conference was held and, one year after the principles of devolution of funding from London to the regions, enshrined in the strategy, were put into practice, NADMA, the National Association of Dance and Mime Animateurs, was formed. Following the publication of Glick's evaluation and of Peppiatt and Greenland's handbook,<sup>25</sup> between 1986 and 1989 a sea-change came over the animateur network as, according to Glick, animateurs had been seen as a

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<sup>24</sup> 'The British garden of the arts has great beauties throughout, and a magnificent display at the centre, but there are empty beds and neglected shrubberies. We would like to see the whole garden in bloom and all the people walking through it to enjoy the flowers.'

Sir William Rees-Mogg in the preface to A.C.G.B. 1984: vii.

<sup>25</sup> Peppiatt, Anthony and Greenland J (1986) *A Handbook for Dance and Mime Animateurs* A.C.G.B.

separate entity. 'They were apart from all other forms of provision. They were not dancers, nor teachers, nor community artists.' (Glick 1986: 13) <sup>26</sup>. The development of this inclusivity is significant for the place of the animateur movement in a more co-ordinated attempt at community responsiveness. It seems to mean that the dance artists themselves desired to be seen as something substantially more than isolated outreach workers and a wider brief was gradually identified which brought together the animateurs with the specialist companies, the dance education workers and dance workers within community arts groups.

As the community dance and mime profession has matured one of its great strengths has become its dynamic ability to link community practice and professional creation, performance and touring.  
(Peppiatt & Venner 1993: 9)

CDMF, the Community Dance and Mime Foundation, succeeded NADMA and was annually funded by the Arts Council in 1990. A year later the six National Dance Agencies were formed and Glick's 1986 evaluation was subsequently updated by Peppiatt and Venner.

As Peppiatt and Venner indicate, in their 1993 survey for the Arts Council of Great Britain, the animateur movement has travelled a long way from the initial 3 posts funded in 1976 to the most recent estimate, in 1993, of 262 <sup>27</sup> (see Appendix 12). Its journey has not been a simple expansion but has also

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<sup>26</sup> Compare with 'a lack of understanding as to what an actor/teacher is' (A.C.G.B. undated [ii]: see earlier in this chapter) which identifies the identical dilemma for actor/teachers.

<sup>27</sup> However, it must be pointed out that in the intervening period the definition of an animateur was broadened quite considerably.

encompassed in part, as the quotation above shows, some of the all-embracing aims of counteracting aesthetic injustice.

Glick's evaluation begins with a definition of an animateur as someone who 'breathes life into' an activity and, in a usage which prefigures some of the later community plays debate about empowerment, she cites animateurs as people who enliven, inspire and activate. As part of her survey she looked at both job descriptions and aims/objectives and found, in addition to considerable overlap between the two, five main objectives recurring. In the context of this study these are seen to be of significance since they clearly represent the notion of responsiveness to the community. They are, in brief:

- To promote and stimulate all dance forms
- To increase the community's awareness of dance <sup>28</sup> ... and to increase appreciation of dance <sup>29</sup>
- To bridge the gap between dance as art and the public at large
- To evaluate the existing dance provision
- Generally to raise the profile of dance within the whole community

(Glick 1986: 32)

The second and third objectives relate most closely to the arguments of the present study since they are at the heart of any attempt to overcome (a) the participation versus presentation divide, (b) the perceived elitism which prevents the de-mystification of the arts and (c) the artificial barrier between

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<sup>28</sup> Through the availability of classes, workshops and residencies organised and sometimes taught by the animateur.

formal education and formal theatre. Interestingly the result has been the identification of a new area of arts endeavour as signified by the move away from NADMA and towards CDMF. The appearance of the word 'community' in the organisation's title as a banner under which all kinds of workers can unite goes some way to removing the discipline-specificity of the animateurs. Bringing together amateur and professional creation and performance in ways which have created a whole new area of arts work, animateurs have developed over nearly twenty years into a discrete profession which has consolidated its status to the point where Glick's earlier hopeful suggestion that 'those still training or already performing should consider it an equally viable option to a performing career' (Glick 1986:13) can be seen in a new, and much more viable, light.

### Education work in arts centres

Forster's (1983) study *Arts Centres and Education* bases its approach on the description of an arts centre in *The Directory of Arts Centres 2* (A.C.G.B. 1982) which lists 174 arts centres using the following criteria:

- there is a programme and a policy for more than one art form
- more than one space is used for arts activities
- there is some professional input (artistic or managerial)
- there is substantial usage which is not part of formal education (or adult education) provision

(Forster 1983: 5)

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<sup>29</sup> Through the promotion of professional performances etc.

According to Forster who visited a sample of 13 centres <sup>30</sup> and conducted a questionnaire-based survey, about 75% of these centres make explicit reference to education in their statements of aims. In 1983, when the study was published and the Arts Council of Great Britain had announced the formal adoption of education work as a prime criterion for client assessment, Forster sought to:

...give overdue consideration to the rapidly developing phenomenon of the education programme provided in arts centres.  
(Forster 1983: 6)

He offers three principal reasons for this development; community, participation and involvement.

At an ideological level, a broadly-based educational programme can enable the entire centre to express its community function; it is a mutually beneficial way of developing an interface with the local community. It allows, too, the expression of a belief in participation. The involvement of artists and craftsmen as teachers helps to break down the artist-audience barriers ...  
(Forster 1983: 7)

Nicholls, undertaking a survey of education activity in arts centres for the National Association of Arts Centres (NAAC), reports that a number of organisations wished to have a definition of education (Nichols 1985:6) This itself is an indication of the fact that what Braden refers to as 'the context for art' (Braden 1978:xiii) was being redefined in the 1970s and 1980s. By 1985, in the same way that generic educational activities have an arts aspect, arts

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<sup>30</sup> Midlands Arts Centre, Birmingham; South Hill Park, Bracknell; The Premises, Norwich; The Old Court, Windsor; The Old Fire Station, Oxford; Lady Lodge Arts Centre, Peterborough; Washington Arts Centre; Spectro Arts Workshop, Newcastle upon Tyne; Castle Chare Community Arts centre, Durham; Sunderland Arts centre; The Dovecote Arts Centre, Stockton on Tees; Darlington Arts Centre, the Midland Group, Nottingham.

activities came to be seen as having an educative aspect; 'arts centres' staffs and managements agree that they are in the business of education' (Nicholls 1985:5). The principal difference lies in the perspective of the service. At the time arts centres were outwith the public sector and undertook their educational work as 'a self-elected voluntary role, wished upon the world, rather than ordained by government' (Nicholls 1985:5). Nicholls adopts this voluntary spirit and deliberately eschews the description of problems and opposing points of view which had characterised some of the Arts Council's earlier findings. <sup>31</sup>

Despite the diversity of activity in arts centres, which militates against their being described as a homogeneous group, Nicholls presents a series of positive pictures which focus on the principles and practices involved. He also documents the need to take account of two key relationships (a) the David and Goliath syndrome - the minor nature of education activity in arts centres as compared to the major state institutionalised nature of formal education and (b) the poacher and gamekeeper syndrome - the developing understanding of the relationship between arts practice and arts education; Forster, however, concludes that greater understanding of the parameters of the work and of its assessment/evaluation are needed.

I believe that the rapid and opportunistic growth of the phenomenon has led to a situation where insufficient attention has been paid to the responsibilities involved. (Forster 1983: 7)

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<sup>31</sup> See MacDonald 1980.



He analysed the programmes of 35 centres over one month in 1982 under 13 art form headings.<sup>32</sup> This analysis reflected two related problems, balance and demand. Forster's figures, although probably neither reliable or valid from a statistician's point of view, show dance and dance-related activity as far outweighing other activities followed by a cluster of theatre, music and textiles with film, jewellery, pottery, literature and photography very poorly served indeed. His conclusions belie the educational aims of arts centres and show 'this purely responsive attitude' (Forster 1983:12) as, if not counterproductive, certainly limited and limiting.

### Summary

In conclusion, there seems to be a clear picture of levels of participation and, therefore outreach success, as being divided by art form. Drama/theatre outreach work happens very largely in the form of T.I.E. and dance in the form of courses and classes organised by the animateur network. In arts centres, where there would seem to be the greatest potential for a rounded, integrated experience, the pattern is repeated as Forster's figures demonstrate.

The major ideological motive in bringing together a range of activities under one roof is the attempt to express an essential unity in these activities.

(Forster 1983: 17)

He identifies two cultures within arts centres, and is dismayed that they:

...seem to have two separate publics; one which attends for classes and courses ... and another, which attends the performances.

(Forster 1983: 18)

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<sup>32</sup> Art, Dance, Dance-related, Film, Jewellery, Literature, Mixed activities, Music, Photography, Pottery, Print-making, Textiles, Theatre.

He concludes that:

... many directors are having to provide for two completely different audiences and that many arts centres are, in fact, two arts centres.

(Forster 1983: 18)

The way forward, according to Forster was to fund more longer term residencies in addition to the courses and classes and to open up the area of critical and contextual studies in arts centres.

## **Conclusion**

The overt and intended effect of all of these sets of initiatives (T.I.E., the animateur network, education in arts centres) was some de-mystification of the theatre process which created a desire to stimulate change from below. A consequence of this, as each of these three areas continued to develop its responsiveness to the social context of its work, was a blurring of the boundaries between purely presentational theatre and formal transmissional education. This set the scene for further developments across the boundaries of theatre and education in the form of extended projects and residencies. These residencies created the ideological space into which larger-scale community projects would later fit. Chapter Four charts the growth of community arts work which similarly brought artists into direct contact with the wider community. It registers the move away from gradualist concerns with participation towards the more aesthetically materialist concerns of collaboration.

# 4

## People's performance

Art and social concern is the characteristic of arts in communities - Community Development Foundation <sup>1</sup>

### **Social concerns: challenging the court culture**

This chapter is the third component of the study's literature survey which, overall, discusses three sets of developments:

#### **1. Art and political concern**

The historical lineage of people's theatre as an aspect of the development of mainstream theatre in the twentieth century.

#### **2. Art and educational concern**

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<sup>1</sup> Community Development Foundation 1992: 9.

The creation of an institutionalised democratisation of culture in the form of an alliance between theatre and education.

### 3. Art and social concern

The appearance of a culturally democratic community arts movement in the second half of the century.

The Community Development Foundation argue for the central importance of the arts generally to community development. By linking, on the one hand, individual and community creativity with, on the other hand, a connection between the arts and a range of social issues.<sup>2</sup> The arts, they claim, have an ability to 'illuminate, stimulate and empower' (CDF 1992:9). Within the more general notion of the relationship of art to politics, education and society, the focus of this study is on the last of those three abilities - the specific function of theatre in the general process of empowerment.

The chapter will begin with an overview of the history and aims of the community arts movement together with an investigation of the ideological and aesthetic spaces in which community artists work. Second, Telford Community Arts will be used as an example of the principles, practices and ethos of community artists working in theatre and of the kinds of ideological transactions which take place. Finally, the chapter will conclude with an

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<sup>2</sup> The CDF looks at the arts in the community in the wider context of health, education, housing, the environment, poverty and social disadvantage. See CDF 1992:9.

introduction to the case study of community plays which forms chapter Five, Communal Theatre.

## Art and the Ordinary

From the late 1960s to the present comparatively little has been written about the theories of community arts, this may be because the activists in such a new movement were principally concerned with making work and developing their practice rather than with the creation of a set of overarching principles. Such writing as there is largely takes the form of factual reports and project documentation, occasionally balanced by acerbic polemic. The paucity of analysis has been regularly noted in the literature, not least by Kelly (1984), Benson (1989) and Rothwell (1992). According to Kelly, in the most outspoken comment on community arts of the last twenty five years,

The first major problem which the community arts movement faces is that it has no clear understanding of its own history. It has neither documented its own history nor drawn any conclusions from it.  
(Kelly 1984:2)

Five years later and writing from an Irish perspective, Benson commented that:

... very little has been published which would allow for a teasing out of the values and beliefs underpinning attitudes of favour or disfavour towards the idea of 'community arts'.  
(Benson 1989:21)

Most recently, emanating from the work of Glamorgan-based 'Valley and Vale', Rothwell, in *Creating Meaning* (1992) cites Kelly's 1984 view quoted above and states

This is unfortunately as true now as it was then. *Creating Meaning* is part of the attempt to rectify that state of affairs, to understand where the movement has been and to contribute to and stimulate debate about where 'community arts' should be going. (Rothwell 1992:5)

The difficulty seems to be one of analysis, or of a consensual analysis of the aims, purpose and direction of the work, rather than one of description. There are a number of detailed reports of practice which document community arts work and these span the period concerned from Braden (1978) via Lewis, Morley and Southwood (1986) to Benson (1989) and Rothwell (1992). Indeed the report of the 1992 National Inquiry into Arts and the Community, published as *Arts and Communities*, is liberally laced with project descriptions from the whole country.

Kelly indicates that there was no defining moment of conception for community arts and that its genesis was in the counter-cultural ferment of the middle to late 1960s. The Arts Council of Great Britain point to specific performance activities dating from 1962 at first in Edinburgh and later in London which, in their view, predate more general community arts activity.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> As the Baldry Report documents:

In 1962 the *Traverse Bookshop* in Edinburgh developed its activities to include a coffee bar and a performance area where it began to present, on a very small scale, experimental theatre and mixed-media productions.

By 1966 the enthusiasm for this type of activity had spread to London. The basement of *Better Books* in Charing Cross Road was converted for similar use and many of the artists now working professionally under the banner of 'experimental drama' and 'experimental projects' began their careers in this small room, e.g. The People Show. (Baldry Report 1974:36)

These activities can be seen, in Marcuse's terms, as a reaction, by people who have lived in the shadow of the dominant ideology, to what he calls the 'desublimation of culture'.

... today's rebels against the established culture also rebel against the beautiful in this culture, against its all too sublimated, segregated, orderly, harmonising forms. Their libertarian aspirations appear as the negation of the traditional culture: as a methodical desublimation.

(Marcuse 1962:52)

But this activity was taking place in a much wider arena than that of art. Art was the focus of actions which, according to Kelly, symbolised a change in the nature of class relationships in this country and there was a belief that class conflicts had been overtaken by new, and genuinely libertarian forms of expression which consisted in the twin notions of (i) taking art out of the galleries and onto the streets and (ii) giving art back to 'the people'. These aims, Kelly argues, constituted a retreat from what he saw as a unified political stance<sup>4</sup> which, itself, militated against the emergence of a consensual conceptual overview for community arts. According to Kelly, it was believed that:

... a new classless politics was being instituted which would aim at giving power to 'the people'.

(Kelly 1984:9)

Kelly's polemical view overlooks a broader historical perspective which is

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<sup>4</sup> The notion of a 'unified political stance' does not hold up, however, since any view of the ideological currents of the period would need to account for extremes represented by those who preached a politics of dissociation, such as Timothy Leary and those who argued for a Marxist critique of the establishment like Tariq Ali. Opposing agendas such as these could not be described as a unified stance.

referred to by the Baldry report and which is clearly dealt with in Braden's key 1978 text *Artists and People*. Citing the work of Herbert Read and Walter Benjamin from the mid-1930s, Braden argues that community arts in the 1960s and 1970s can be seen as a response to the insular view of art as a self-referential aesthetic - the pursuit of beauty, which was critiqued by the Frankfurt School and which is reminiscent of Marcuse's notion of 'segregated, orderly, harmonious forms'. Braden adduces Benjamin's idea that the artistic tension between content and form is more about *context* and form to advance the case that art communicates within a social and cultural context, forming 'a cultural pattern to which the artist conforms'. According to Braden this is a mid-century foreshadowing of the practice of the 1970s.

Kelly usefully identifies the main components of that contemporary practice.<sup>5</sup>

Firstly, there was the passionate interest in creating new and liberatory forms of expression, which the Arts Labs both served and fuelled. Secondly, there was the movement by groups of fine artists out of the galleries and into the streets. Thirdly, there was the emergence of a new kind of political activist who believed that creativity was an essential tool in any kind of radical struggle.

(Kelly 1984:11)

Any break with established tradition encounters the kind of scepticism which greeted the appearance of the kind of work made by these three groups of people. Inevitably questions were asked about whether this was 'art' and

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<sup>5</sup> The term 'contemporary' may be confusing here. While Kelly was writing about the inception of community arts between 1967 and 1970, Braden refers to a practice which continued at least until the late 1970s.



these questions became sharpened quite considerably by requests for public funds. As Braden indicates <sup>6</sup> the problem thrust itself forward into the funding arena.

The question of the relationship of art and artists to a wider social spectrum is one which cannot be ignored by the public arts patron. Yet the problem is often debated whether the forms of expression which are clearly successful in terms of 'community arts' should be included within their categories of 'real art' at all.  
(Braden 1978:13)

During even the early stages of what Kelly describes as 'the age of Aquarius', with all that description connotes of newly-discovered freedoms, samizdat publications and individual self-actualisation, the controlling hand of the UK arts funding system, Kelly argues, could be felt. The Arts Lab in Drury Lane, UFO at The Roundhouse in Chalk Farm and Middle Earth in Covent Garden <sup>7</sup> were part of a movement towards more unorthodox relationships between art and society which, taken together, illustrate a picture of attempts to break down social, political and artistic barriers which spread across the nation to the point where:

By the end of 1968 there were arts labs open in Brighton, Birmingham, Liverpool, Cambridge and Halifax.  
(Kelly 1984:9)

### **The early 1970s**

From these loose origins of what is now called the community arts movement, principally but not exclusively in London, it was only five years before there was an Arts Council report (the Baldry Report). This sought to investigate the

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<sup>6</sup> See Braden 1978:12 & ff.

activity and define the development and funding roles for ACGB. The Arts Council's strategy had thus far been to form the New Activities Committee in 1969 and to supersede that with the Experimental Projects Committee in 1971. The early 1970s were important because they saw the community arts movement and the arts patronage system struggling to come to terms with conflicting needs. The Arts Council's Experimental Projects Committee <sup>8</sup> commissioned a report to assess the national picture. As part of the evidence-gathering process, Rufus Harris, the report's author, held a two day seminar at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) which demonstrated these needs. On the one hand, the Arts Council needed to define community arts, an activity which was profoundly antipathetic to the spirit of community arts, and regulate its relationship with the movement. On the other hand, community arts practitioners had to grapple with the question of whether to unite as a group in order to tap into the subsidy system and release funds for the work, or whether to remain as disparate individuals and, by implication, continue to be unfunded or, at best, sporadically funded. This question was tempered with concerns about the problems of hidden control which some community artists perceived subsidy as bringing to all art.

The response of the Arts Council was to set up a small working party, chaired by Professor Harold Baldry, whose brief was to examine the breadth of

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<sup>7</sup> See the Baldry Report (A.C.G.B.1974: 36-38).

community arts in Britain in order to advise the Arts Council on its future role. However, these terms of reference were conditioned by the funding question since, according to Baldry:

... what has been less clear is the validity of their claim for subsidy specifically from the Arts Council.  
(Baldry Report 1974:3)

The response of the community arts movement to the ICA seminar was to unify and create a national organisation.

This was, in effect, the first national gathering of those people who had begun calling themselves community artists, and it was from this meeting that the Association of Community Artists began.  
(Kelly 1984:12)

The founding of the Association of Community Artists (ACA) crystallised not only the community arts movement but also the debate about how to organise unorthodox arts activity. This was brought into particularly sharp focus for a large group <sup>9</sup> with such apparently radical views on systems, structures and hierarchies which caricatured the arts establishment as 'the citadel'. According to Kelly, ACA's attempts to create what might now be described as a 'flat-archy' led to strong internal tensions which were never resolved.

It was ... a very Aquarian organisation; pushy and powerful when dealing with simple practical matters, but eclectic to the point of sloppiness when it came to questions of theory.  
(Kelly 1984:12)

Where it was successful, however, was in campaigning for funding recognition as the recommendations in the Baldry Report demonstrate.<sup>10</sup> Although falling

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<sup>8</sup> The Arts Council of Great Britain had, by this stage and on the advice of this committee, distinguished between community arts and performance art devolving the latter to the Art Panel.

<sup>9</sup> At the time of the founding of the ACA the Directory of Community Artists had 163 entries.

<sup>10</sup> See Appendix 13.

short of proposing the establishment of a new department at the Arts Council, Baldry principally recommended that there should be a substantial injection of cash <sup>11</sup> and the creation of a Community Arts Panel. These recommendations were tempered with a slight wariness about creating permanent structures for servicing what might be a temporary phenomenon <sup>12</sup> and with a clear indication that there should be a review of support for community arts after a period of two years. The publication of the Baldry report announced both the lobbying success of ACA and the coming of age of community arts. It symbolised an official recognition for the movement which was a two-edged sword as the funding system bit into arts practice and somewhat re-defined it, making community arts prey to becoming funding-led rather than art-led.<sup>13</sup>

During the two year period which followed and which was marked by the publication of Braden's *Artists and People* (1978) opinion was divided. Kelly describes in detail his view of the process by which the lack of a consensual conceptual analysis led, paradoxically, to the danger of community artists being implicated in supporting the state structures to which they objected.

Our position was such, then, that we might need to fight for an increase in taxation in order that the Arts Council might receive more money, so that community artists might give more of it back to 'the people'.

(Kelly 1984:29)

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<sup>11</sup> £250,000 in 1975/76.

<sup>12</sup> See the Baldry Report p.26. Community arts was viewed as being: '... a development with an uncertain future which only time and experience will reveal.'

<sup>13</sup> Kelly 1984:29 & ff explores this argument in detail.

This process, which Kelly calls 'grant-addicted pragmatism' led to the political and artistic emasculation of the ACA and, ultimately, to its demise.

We came as invaders, but ... we were soon acting and talking like the natives of the citadel.  
(Kelly 1984:29)

Braden, too, notes the difficulty of biting the hand that feeds you whilst simultaneously accepting and supporting its authority. She identifies a delicate balance which seems to militate against the general success of community arts.

... if what I write is seen as too threatening to established rules and values in the arts world, a reason will be found to dismiss the findings of this report. In effect the public patron is the last in line to respond to artistic innovations.  
(Braden 1978:13)

The problem between 1978 and 1980 was the nature of the response from the public patrons. As community artists, under the auspices of the ACA, had become progressively more involved in the mechanics and politics of arts funding so they had begun to feel the need for some kind of permanent administration. In Kelly's terms they were in danger of becoming just another set of inhabitants of the citadel whilst in Braden's view they were in the process of having their work recognised by the only available means; an activity she calls 'verification through patronage'. The end result of a refusal to fund ACA directly because it was seen to be a political body <sup>14</sup> was the formation in 1980 of the Shelton Trust. This was conceived as a focus for the

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<sup>14</sup> See Kelly 1984:31. Both ACGB and the Gulbenkian Foundation refused funding.

purely educational and informative aspects <sup>15</sup> of what had hitherto been ACA's activity. Effectively a parallel set of structures had been created which can be represented as follows:

	All arts (statutory body)	Community arts (non-statutory body)
National remit	A.C.G.B.	Shelton Trust
Regional remit	R.A.A.s	ACA (regionalised)

It was in this climate that community arts began to lose its national voice. The Arts Council and the Council of Regional Arts Associations (CoRAA) published a paper <sup>16</sup> which set out the concept and spirit of the devolution of responsibility for some of the Arts Council's clients/activities to the RAAs. Community arts was recommended for devolution and, by 1982, despite opposition from West Midlands Arts, this partial de-centralisation was completed and all RAAs had community arts officers. These officers turned their minds to training and from 1983 the Arts Council/CoRAA Combined Arts Planning Group began to want to create a certificated training scheme which eventually emerged as the Arts Training Programme (ATP) at Leicester Polytechnic.

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<sup>15</sup> ACA retained its 'political' approach but re-organised on a regional basis.  
<sup>16</sup> ACGB/CoRAA (1980) *Towards a New Relationship* London: ACGB/CoRAA.

Kelly sees this as the end of a process of professionalising community artists which finally removed them from their original ideals and which resulted in a retreat from the notion of 'storming the citadels' which subtitles his book.

It can clearly be seen that 'training' ... is not a problem for the community arts movement. Rather it is a problem for those funding agencies that, having decided to fund community arts, cannot find enough people to fill the posts they have in mind. As soon as the funding agencies have successfully devised their strategy for closing this gap, and as soon as those students have certificates authenticating them as community artists, then the history of community arts, as it has been practised in this country to date, will have finally finished.

(Kelly 1984:37/8.)

But Braden sites the conflict in a different arena - that of the arts in their social contexts.

It is far less challenging, but easier to place the search for 'cultural democracy' firmly to one side of the main stream of 'high culture'.

(Braden 1978:14)

Whilst Kelly regrets the effective de-politicisation of the community arts lobby by the process of regionalisation and professionalisation, Braden draws the conclusion that the new pan-European category of arts worker, the 'animateur' is, regretfully, working in a condescending <sup>17</sup> way beside the élite tradition in a kind of cultural parallel which does not tangle with traditional 'standards'.

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<sup>17</sup> Braden's footnote on the term 'animation' concludes as follows:

... the implicit assumption is that the context in which the 'animateur' works is a moribund situation which is *ready* for him (sic) to administer the kiss of life. ...Unless the artist first of all *creates* the right context in which to work (a task which essentially includes *responding* to the *life* of a particular context) that is, unless he or she develops long-term social relationships within the given community - such ministrations will turn into the kiss of death.

(Braden 1978:186)

The picture of community arts practice and its politics in the mid-1980s is therefore one of a funding-led creation of a hierarchy of trained and untrained workers who animate unskilled ordinary people.

The terms *animateur* and *animation* should, therefore, be discouraged. Not only do they reveal a lack of analysis on the part of those who use them, but they reinforce the notion that the artist is separate from other people by virtue of the fact that he (sic) is in possession of inspired gift - or gifts of inspiration. The community artist, on the contrary, seeks to destroy this notion and to make his or her contribution to society like any other worker.

(Braden 1978:186)

This is a problem which the succeeding years have failed to solve since it is very strongly reminiscent of the current debate about the differences between paid and unpaid workers on community plays which are always, in some sense, animated from outside the community and which now often incorporate overt programmes of skills transmission and training both for participants and for arts workers.<sup>18</sup> As an aspect of the problems surrounding the concept of 'arts for all' this debate is focused by community plays because of the inbuilt performance priority. Unlike some other forms of community arts practice which stress participation, communal performance is predicated on both process *and* product.

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<sup>18</sup> Remould Theatre Company's 1995 Bridlington Town Community Play incorporated two professional 'traineeships', one in theatre design for community performance and the other in community play direction.



## 1986-1996

The most recent developments in community arts are catalogued, if not critiqued, in three key documents produced respectively by the Greater London Council (GLC), Valley and Vale and the Community Development Foundation (CDF).<sup>19</sup> Both the GLC and Valley and Vale documents are polemical in the Kelly mould. Peter Pitt, the then chair of the GLC Arts and Recreation Committee, wrote in the foreword to the GLC report of the Labour imperative to promote radicalism in local government after the elections of May 1981.

It was essential to include Arts and Recreation within this overall political direction because for too long cultural politics had never figured as part of the political process emanating from County Hall.

(GLC 1986:2)

Rothwell, however, casts himself more in the role of the historian of community arts who is taking over where Kelly left off. *Creating Meaning* avoids the temptation simply to catalogue projects and activities and aims:

... to give an insight into how ideas about community arts have developed since 1980: from its initial motivation based on the belief that participation in the arts should be a 'basic human right', towards the development of issue-based work stimulated by the desire to support specific campaigns, through to the more recent attempts to use the arts as a tool for longer term development, as part of a process of building broader local involvement in the decisions that affect the lives of our communities.

(Rothwell 1992:5)

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<sup>19</sup> 1. G.L.C.1986 2.Rothwell 1992. 3.C.D.F.1992.

Both the GLC and Rothwell aim to present the work as culturally democratic and left-wing and this is symbolised by Nicholson's observation <sup>20</sup> in the GLC report:

...it still seems funny five years later that anybody could object to the simple idea that more people should have access to the arts as spectators, practitioners or producers ... of course the Aesthetes and the élites don't like something they can't control, and we unashamedly set about starting something which we hope will lead to ordinary people having more control over a small though important part of their lives.  
(GLC 1986:3)

In contrast, Rothwell uses the work of Valley and Vale, the Glamorgan-based community arts group, as a springboard for a critical/historical discussion which looks at people's history, self-advocacy and community empowerment. These are concepts which have become central to the developing practice of the community play and can be seen to form the heart of the notion of communal theatre.

The CDF book is a measured overview <sup>21</sup> of the national state of the arts as they affect local communities. Ignoring Kelly, Braden and Rothwell, Peter Brinson states in the preface that

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<sup>20</sup> George Nicholson, Chair of the GLC Community Arts sub-committee 1986.

<sup>21</sup> The preface to the CDF document states:

Our Inquiry and Report take place at a critical moment for the arts and communities of the United Kingdom. A change of government, the development of the National Arts and Media Strategy for England and Wales with parallel strategic planning in Scotland, the reorganisation of the Arts Council of Great Britain, the formation of Regional Arts Boards and the continuing impact of social and economic change, pose crucial questions about the role of the arts in our national cultures, their influence upon communities, and their relationship with the power structures of the British state.  
(CDF 1995:ix)

No detailed consideration of arts in the community has been undertaken since community arts were devolved from the Arts Council to the Regional Arts Associations at the end of the 1970s. (CDF 1995:ix)

The differences between the three accounts, which give a picture of the diversity of community arts in the last ten years, can be clearly seen from the conclusions they each reach or from the recommendations they make. The GLC report has a strong aesthetic justice dimension in the shape of a cultural policy which had social and economic aspects <sup>22</sup> and which:

... sought to redress the inequalities in existing cultural provision.

(GLC 1986:135)

The GLC programme <sup>23</sup> which owes much to Kelly's analysis is described as having 'a radically different view of culture and art from those of other funding bodies' and, whilst it seems to have democratised aspects of the funding process its main success lay in counteracting the initial adverse publicity which its policies generated.

...Proposed measures to balance cultural funding between national institutions and community based projects were described as 'a typically offensive act in the class war'.

(GLC 1986:136)

However, the consistent application of the principle of the democratisation of culture led to a climate in which the issues could be publicly discussed. The GLC formulated some of the issues in a manner which has considerable resonance for this study and for communal theatre in general, as follows:

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<sup>22</sup> The GLC claim this as an arts policy first..

<sup>23</sup> See Appendix 14.

Why should we subsidise the serious theatre and not the circus?  
 Why should we subsidise the classical singer and not the folk  
 singer? Why should we, for example, generally subsidise those arts  
 which have their roots in a court culture, and not those which have  
 their roots in a people's culture?  
 (GLC 1986:137)

The GLC were plainly attempting to foster a climate in which it could encourage the possibility of a more aesthetically just society.

Cope, of Valley and Vale, writing in 1992, brings the community arts movement into contemporary focus by pointing to a move away from the instrumental use of the arts for political purposes in connection with single-issue campaigns and towards what he describes as 'a wider, longer-term, less spontaneous concept of change' (Rothwell 1992:13). There is a parallel here, albeit not of the same order or importance, with Brecht's relaxation of didacticism following the American exile and the publication of the *Short Organum*. The key influence for community arts was not an inter-national war but the more localised struggle between the Thatcher government and the miners unions over pit closures in particular and the strength of Trade Unionism in general.

Of all the campaigns which were supported by community arts activity in the 1980s, the miner's strike of 1984-5 was undoubtedly the most significant. It was a critical moment for people in mining communities as well as for the Trade Union movement and for Thatcherism.  
 (Rothwell 1992:12)

In a coalition which sounds like a miniature version of the Popular Front of the mid-1930s, apparently disparate groups joined forces to fight on the twin fronts of culture and democracy and community arts groups saw themselves as important in this struggle.

The cause of the miners united groups which had different experiences but a similar interest in the transformation of society. The strike saw imaginative, if unlikely, links between black community groups campaigning against police racism and trades unionists opposing the enforcement of anti-union legislation, between city-based lesbian and gay groups and rural miners support groups.

(Rothwell 1992:13)

However, when the strike was over these alliances proved difficult to sustain as a new network to promote social change. Community artists, in Wales in particular, felt a need to withdraw from campaign-associated activity since petitioning and politicking were seen to be no longer as effective as they had been prior to the 1980s. This retreat from an overtly political, utilitarian approach to the arts in communities is part of the culture in which Ann Jellicoe could develop community plays whilst proclaiming that politics was divisive. Community artists learned the lessons of trade union defeat in a sharply right-wing climate and both widened and lengthened their horizons. Community playmakers, at least those working in the Colway Theatre Trust mould, sought to use communal theatre as a kind of healing balm for damaged and fragmented communities.

Valley and Vale Community Arts can be seen to be promoting aesthetic justice in three of its key activities which Rothwell documents as Making History, Taking Control and Changing Places. Making History refers to an oral history living archive project which re-values the role of ordinary people in history and which draws on the collective memory of a community to enable it:

... to value and understand the experiences upon which it is built, experiences which are often undermined or neglected.  
(Rothwell 1992:46)

The focus of Valley and Vale's Making History clearly shows the spread of community arts activity away from single-issue campaigning and towards a process of making sense of the present through deeper understanding of the past in ways which promote aesthetic justice because they place the ordinary person at the centre of the process.

The aim of these projects <sup>24</sup> is to enable these communities to develop a resource of images, recollections and information about their own past which would make sense of the great social and economic upheavals that were and are occurring in both areas.  
(Rothwell 1992:46/7)

There is a sense in which the phrase 'taking control' refers to all participatory arts activities which have an element of aesthetic justice. The three examples from Valley and Vale <sup>25</sup> would, therefore, come under the same heading but when Rothwell uses the term Taking Control to head a section of his report he is referring specifically to the equal opportunities dimension. This work is predicated on the comparative success of enabling processes in the arts in the community generally; and looks at the extension of these processes to people with disabilities. Everything which Rothwell uses to describe the case of the disabled for inclusion in arts activity can also stand as a paradigm for all of

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<sup>24</sup> Valley and Vale worked to create two living archives one in Barry and the other in the Ogwr valley. These are the 'areas' to which the quotation refers.

<sup>25</sup> Making History, Taking Control, Changing Places.

the culturally disenfranchised; the ordinary. As photographer David Hevey argues

My definition of disability is of people who are systematically segregated from society ... it is a civil rights issue.  
(Rothwell 1992:56)

When community plays developed beyond the Colway Model they took on the arts and disability issue and, in an example of community arts practice affecting and being incorporated into community play practice, Belgrade Model <sup>26</sup> plays sought the aesthetically just participation of all, regardless of (dis)ability.

The third aspect of Valley and Vale's activity also has parallels with contemporary community play practice. Changing Places describes the contribution of the arts to the empowerment of ordinary people with respect to their living circumstances and the amenities which their locale has, and desires to keep, or aspires to have. Valley and Vale sought to link real arts activity to real practical needs in an attempt to open up participation in society.

There is a need to reconnect artistic activity to the concerns of a community, to see it as a means of thinking creatively about problems and of exploring new directions.  
(Rothwell 1992:66)

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<sup>26</sup> (i) See Chapter 5 for a comparison of the Colway and Belgrade models.

(ii) Avon Community Theatre Association (ACTA), working in working class communities, have always involved people with disabilities.

These concerns can also be to do with the infrastructure of a community and part of the need to broaden local democracy. Valley and Vale document the rescue and redevelopment of the 1894 Blaengawr Workmen's Hall and Institute to reflect the needs of the community. This activity which spans the period 1986-1992 culminated in the staging of a community play which, in some measure, celebrated the process.

A unique feature of this revival had been the involvement of the community in planning, stimulated by the sequence of arts-based projects which enabled local people to voice their needs.  
(Rothwell 1992:71)

This kind of community arts initiative was replicated nation-wide. Telford Community Arts (TCA), working expressly with working class communities in Shropshire, had similar success with a campaign in 1984 which prevented housing development on Telford's largest open space.<sup>27</sup> The notion of working with the community to identify the issues on which a dramatic symbol can be based also surfaced in community play practice. Jon Oram <sup>28</sup> currently uses a process called Community Soundings <sup>29</sup> by which a group planning a community play is stimulated by drama workshop activity to discuss their image of their community and its strengths and weaknesses.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Hands Off Our Park was a video made in 1984/5 by Telford Community Arts. See TCA 1988:12.

<sup>28</sup> Once Ann Jellicoe's assistant; now Artistic Director of the Colway Theatre Trust.

<sup>29</sup> See Chapter 6.

<sup>30</sup> Oram cites a Canadian community play which was successful in opposing a building development. For an account of this see Little E J & Sim R A (1992) *Dramatic Action: How Eramosa Township Took Action* Guelph:Ontario Rural Learning Association.



All three of Valley and Vale's key activities underline a practical commitment and serve to identify a wide political approach which Kelly would recognise.

Without the popular control of culture, there cannot be full democracy, there cannot be functioning communities. At present, access to participation in the 'process of communication' is unevenly distributed. The one-way traffic of the dominant culture sustains forces hostile to the very notion of 'community', in order to preserve the power of a minority.

(Rothwell 1992:80)

It is in the report of the CDF's National Inquiry into the Arts and the Community that many of the issues come together in a form which genuinely takes an overview and which does not principally consist of a series of project profiles. The CDF report agrees with Kelly's view of an untheorised community arts movement but supports the overall aim of empowering people in their communities through creative endeavour.

Policies to advance arts in the community need a coherent theory if they are to capture public imagination and win support.

(CDF 1995:91)

The CDF also distinguishes between *community arts* and *arts in the community*.<sup>31</sup> This is a useful distinction since it raises again the existence (or not) of a political imperative in this work.

(*Community arts*) ... aimed primarily to stimulate involvement in the arts among people in disadvantaged conditions, seeing in the arts a vehicle for expressing political and social concerns as well as creativity.

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<sup>31</sup> See Appendix 15 for these definitions in full.

*Arts in the community* means those arts which emanate from or are created to serve people in a particular locality or community of interest.

(CDF 1995:87)

In the context of these definitions it can be seen that the community play, whilst drawing from the community arts tradition, is located as one of the arts in the community. Early community plays in the Colway mould were community theatre; an aspect of the apparently apolitical arts in the community but as the idea of the community play developed, it borrowed some working principles from the political community arts tradition.

### **Principles and practices: Telford Community Arts**

Telford Community Arts has been chosen for its longevity and success and because of the national and international recognition of its work. In addition, its significance for this study lies particularly in its Marxist leanings and in its focus on theatre and drama through the medium of its weekly workshops and the plays which resulted from them. These aspects, together with its espousal of democratic working practices, locate the group squarely within the cultural democratic tradition delineated by Kelly. This group worked in Shropshire from 1974 to 1989/90 and its drama workshops <sup>32</sup> and their resultant products demonstrate aesthetic justice in action as well as providing an alternative model of participatory theatre which was developing at the same time as the

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<sup>32</sup> All the work of TCA shares the same ethos but, for the purposes of the study this section of the chapter will concentrate on their theatre work.

more public, and more widely reported community play movement. The group which, in the best Aquarian tradition, was collectively managed,<sup>33</sup> presented a kind of manifesto or mission statement in their 1988 review publication *Not the Royal Opera*. This reveals both their sympathies with aesthetic justice and their aesthetic materialist approach:

We challenge the notion that the arts are something for 'other people' to do, for the 'well off' or the 'well educated', and other privileged sections of our society. Our priority is to work in the interests of the working class and to organise our activities accordingly.  
(TCA 1988:2)

It is notable that the constituency of interest that TCA cites for its work is referred to by its class origins. This represents a deeply-held commitment to pluralism as opposed to individualism and one which operates within the Marxist two class <sup>34</sup> view of society. Telford Community Arts clearly sees culture as a battleground and believes that there is only one culture in a bourgeois, capitalist society. Relating art and social action, TCA argues that we cannot begin to understand what a socialist culture might be like until a socialist society has been created. TCA has produced some innovative participatory theatre which promotes the view that the key to successful

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<sup>33</sup> TCA was user-managed.

'Membership of Telford Community Arts is open to people who have participated in our workshop process and who have completed a workshop project. We believe that these are the people who, together with the workers in the project, should be making the decisions about our policy and programme.'  
(TCA 1988:30.)

<sup>34</sup> There is no acceptance of the hierarchical view of social stratification here. This position, as outlined in chapter 1, recognises only two groupings - those who own the means of production and those who sell their labour. The second grouping covers the vast majority of the population.

collaboration is political engagement. TCA's founder and director Graham Woodruff exposes the key differences between his work and that of Ann Jellicoe as being to do with grasping the nettle of politics.<sup>35</sup> Jellicoe is afraid of dividing her communities along party lines because her aim is unification, whereas Woodruff sees his community as already and irrevocably divided by economics and seeks to work with that problem to make issue-based theatre. Woodruff's communities work collaboratively with his workers to find their own voice and express it effectively <sup>36</sup> in other words they need to go beyond expression, which is an individualist concept, into action. Telford Community Arts views its communities from a post-Brechtian standpoint as alterable and capable of taking action.

Although working within the framework of the British community arts movement TCA eschewed the use of the word community to describe its participants. In a 1989 article for *New Theatre Quarterly* which offered a strong critique of the Colway Theatre Trust's community play work, Woodruff, drew attention to this and restated the dilemma.

Community ... (lends) ... a stamp of often spurious togetherness to  
bodies politic or theatric.  
(Woodruff 1989:370)

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<sup>35</sup> Woodruff's response to Jellicoe's view that politics is divisive is as follows:

Ann Jellicoe seems to think that this (her) formulation of community plays avoids politics  
Of course, it does nothing of the kind. It reinforces an idealised notion of community as  
an unchanging entity.  
(Woodruff 1989: 371).

<sup>36</sup> However, it must be noted that there has as yet been no detailed study of TCA's work and it is therefore not known whether interviews with TCA participants would confirm the community artists' perception.

The word 'community' according to Woodruff, was being used, as part of a deliberate retreat from stridency and overt politics, to disguise the unacceptability of the real constituency - the working class. Phrases of 'harsh commitment' were being replaced by a somewhat romantic and sentimental usage; 'the community' which 'implies something positive and worthwhile' (Woodruff 1989:370).

TCA and, specifically the practice of its 'No More Cream Buns' theatre workshop, represents a strongly aesthetic materialist example of communal theatre which emanated from within the community arts movement. Woodruff uses this practice to argue against the Colway method of community playmaking in ways which reveal the democratic ethos of the workshop group. His thesis is that the apparent shift of priorities implied by CTT-style community plays is, first, a chimera based on geographical coincidence and, second, a misunderstanding about the potential of the working class. He indicates that there is a lack of focus on issues which affect the lives of the working class in the process of CTT plays because for Ann Jellicoe:

... 'community' is simply a synonym for the town, and the objective of her community plays is to get as many people as possible involved. It appears a very attractive proposal. Her 'community' means everyone.  
(Woodruff 1989:370)

He also argues that there is an avoidance of politically contentious issues in the CTT process and cites Jellicoe's instruction to David Edgar that the villain

of *Entertaining Strangers*, Edgar's CTT play for Dorchester, should come from out of town. Since Jellicoe wants to use theatre instrumentally to 'form'<sup>37</sup> communities this is a perfect opportunity for the playwright to find an external source of evil against which 'the community' can unite. As Woodruff says, *Entertaining Strangers*:

... fits the bill perfectly. It shows how extremists in nineteenth-century Dorchester ... compromise and reconcile their differences to fight the evil of cholera. In effect, it is an update of the St George and the Dragon myth, with the community, Dorchester, as the hero. (Woodruff 1989:371)

It is as if the solution to a community's problems can come from the very act of drawing together to unite against a common enemy. In reality for CTT playmakers and their communities, the enemy seems to be a lack of community feeling and fragmentation of rural life. The dramatic symbol for these problems is the central theme of the community play, in the case of Dorchester, cholera. Woodruff's argument is that this is a misunderstanding of the common enemy which has to be identified not from the community's history but from the present day concerns of its socially, and therefore culturally, disenfranchised - the working class. TCA's theatre work is an example of a technique for addressing aesthetic injustice where the participants become their own judiciary.

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<sup>37</sup> See Baz Kershaw's article for Theatre Ireland cited by Jellicoe in the preface to Jellicoe 1987 '... community plays are a community-forming process. Thus theatre is created *through* community. (Jellicoe 1987:xvii.)

Drawing on the TCA tradition of weekly drama workshops, Woodruff cites a model of practice which rivals CTT. The 'No More Cream Buns' theatre workshop has a common ground which is neither geography nor single-issue interest and which offers a challenge to the all-embracing notion of community within which other community playmakers operate. The Telford group:

...share an experience of working-class life in Britain in the late 'eighties and a desire to find creative expression for that experience.

(Woodruff 1989:372)

The process used by the weekly Telford drama group, which was developed from 1974 onwards, centres on the identification of issues followed by improvisation and debate <sup>38</sup> to create a series of self-contained theatre sketches. As time went by these sets of devised pieces evolved into the scenario for a piece of community playmaking which was democratic and open. People's performance.

Throughout this process, the workshop remained in control of the creative process, determining both the form and content of the play.

(Woodruff 1989:372)

Class and control are therefore the key issues in the work of the Telford group. Just as the form and content of the product work in symbiosis so the form and content of the process is directly related to the *social context* of the workshop.

Braden cites Cathy Mackerras of TCA in this connection.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> See Appendix 16 for a detailed description of the TCA devising process.

<sup>39</sup> Mackerras had visited Jean Hurstel's theatre project in Montbéliard.

... the marvellous thing was that it was the first time I had seen working people in a creative situation where they made the decisions and thought about the content. (Braden 1978:129) <sup>40</sup>

Class is the unifying feature of the Telford group and the issues of the moment form the basis on which the process moves forward.

... our workshops emphasise *group activity* where individuals can test their ideas with others ...

... the workshops also emphasise originality, expressing the opinions and feelings of *those taking part*.  
(TCA 1988:5ff) <sup>41</sup>

This is an aesthetically materialist communal theatre practice which, according to Woodruff, is international.<sup>42</sup> It makes an alternative, parallel tradition of community playmaking to the CTT method differing from it in ethos and origin and, therefore, in working processes. The 'No More Cream' Buns theatre workshop, within the umbrella of Telford Community Arts, starts from a working class constituency of interest, the culturally disenfranchised, and makes communal theatre over which it retains artistic control. This process marks its work as coming from the British community

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<sup>40</sup> However, Hurstel was clearly acting in some sense as an animateur.

Hurstel's approach ... was to *stimulate a situation* in which the availability of the means of expression actively encouraged local people to voice and analyse their condition.  
(Braden 1978:131.) My emphasis.

<sup>41</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>42</sup> Woodruff says that:

This form of community play can be found throughout the world - in the Peugeot car town of Montbéliard (France), the shanty-town of Cross Roads (South Africa), the grape-farming districts of Fresno (California), the Falls Road of Belfast. In each case a group of workers, employed and unemployed, come together to create theatre which expresses their values, their experiences and their views of the world around them. In each case, the control of the creative process is retained by the group. In each case the plays are performed for working-class audiences. Of, by and for.  
(Woodruff 1989:373)



arts tradition rather than from the mainstream theatre tradition.

## Finding commonality

The tendency in capitalist society is towards a quite artificial separation of work (and politics) from culture (and art), so that even where art is critical of society it addresses the individual far from the processes of production, whether in the dark of the cinema, the solitude of reading a novel, or the privacy of the home watching television. Under these conditions any artistic assertion that society can or must be changed becomes far less effective.<sup>43</sup> (Broadside Mobile Workers' Theatre.)

The location of TCA's communal theatre work in the community arts tradition made it comparatively invisible in terms of national mainstream theatre activity but extremely effective in terms of empowering its participants to influence local social change.<sup>44</sup> When community plays came to prominence in 1978 they did so largely because of Ann Jellicoe and her background in mainstream theatre. The profile of the community play was enhanced early on by the attentions of the national media. BBC's Arena programme made a documentary only three years after the first play<sup>45</sup> and six years later Ann Jellicoe published her method in *Community Plays: how to put them on* (Jellicoe 1987).

The principles and merits of Jellicoe's book were widely accepted.

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<sup>43</sup> BMWT undated.

<sup>44</sup> TCA cites many examples of this in TCA 1988.

<sup>45</sup> BBC (1981) Arena - A Play for Bridport.

We've had a playscheme ... now a community play is what we want to get everyone together.<sup>46</sup>  
(Woodruff 1989:371 )

But some practitioners began to question the method and there was a series of attempts to understand the form better <sup>47</sup> which dispelled the aura of orthodoxy which had built up around Jellicoe's method. The Colway method did not, however, ossify and, by the time, Jon Oram had taken over from Ann Jellicoe as Director of the Colway Theatre Trust in 1985, he was speaking in terms which would sit equally well in the community arts tradition.

... everyone can find a commonality. Creativity is not only a province for the élite, and the attitude that it is alienates people.  
(CTT 1988:1)

## Summary

Telford Community Arts is a specific and successful example of an organisation which grappled over a number of years with six of the key aspects of community arts activity which this chapter has identified. These are:

- finding genuinely libertarian forms of expression.

For TCA this took the form of both operating within a consensus and promoting street performance so that working class could speak to working class without the intervening barrier of a forbidding theatre building which was redolent of cultural élitism .

- coping with the problems of 'hidden control.'

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<sup>46</sup> Woodruff is citing 'a member of the Tipton community association'.

<sup>47</sup> As well as reflections on the practice this enquiry was also conducted more formally by Open Theatre Company via their Carnegie Foundation funded study (Open Theatre 1994).

The group brought the potential difficulties of being funding-led, and therefore, in some ways running the risk of acting as agent of the system, to the fore by using collective decision-making.

- rejecting the idea of the artist as something separate from the people.

Operating within the two-class view of society TCA sought to equate their arts skills with the skill of their groups and worked against the establishment of hierarchies based on artistic ability.

- supporting a people's culture.

TCA's stance, as typified by their choice of title for their review publication *Not the Royal Opera* (TCA 1988) locates their work within the anti-élitist tradition which has been exemplified in this study by reference to Raymond Williams, Sue Braden and Owen Kelly.

- challenging the idea that 'community' should be a synonym for 'the whole town.'

In defining their community TCA were very clear, first, that they worked with and for the working class and, second, that the key to establishing congruence in this context was to be fully resident. The key workers in the group lived in Telford. This meant that their playmaking community was a self-selecting, twice-defined group consisting, first, of those who came regularly to the drama workshops and, second, of those who identified the issues upon which the plays were to be founded.

- theatre for 'healing' versus theatre for development.

TCA located itself squarely within the later Brechtian tradition of creating dialectical theatre which took a long view of its potential efficacy and eschewed the liberal-humanist idea that the process of community-forming should be central to community theatre. Through being issue-based, TCA practices valued the longer-term potential for social action over the short-term fabrication of a new cohesiveness within the community.

In addition to the points discussed above there are some significant differences between the TCA aesthetic and those of more traditionally recognisable community plays. This will become apparent in chapter five and in the conclusion but, as part of the summary of the importance of TCA, it is important to set out some of these differences here. TCA drama/theatre projects, which are classed by Woodruff as community plays<sup>48</sup> derive from a programme of workshops which is permanent and ongoing rather than instituted specifically with a performance in mind. This feature of TCA's work automatically alleviates many of the legacy difficulties associated with community plays which have no structure for a continuing presence in their communities after a performance has taken place.<sup>49</sup> One feature of the workshop programme is the fact that it operates with smaller numbers<sup>50</sup> so, it

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<sup>48</sup> At the 1992 National One-Day Community Play Conference, Graham Woodruff challenged strongly the Open Theatre definition of a community play which is presented in chapter five, arguing that smaller scale projects could still qualify for the title.

<sup>49</sup> See Jones 1995(b) for a discussion of the problems of the legacy of community play projects which practitioners characterise as 'what to do when the circus leaves town.'

<sup>50</sup> For example, a group of 20 as opposed to a typical community play cast of c. 100.

can be argued, that the community penetration of larger projects is greater than that of TCA. However, it is fair to say that TCA would argue strongly for the quality as opposed to the breadth of its work. It may be that larger projects are unable to achieve consensus over the views of the participants thus making issue-based, as opposed to historical, projects more difficult with larger numbers.

Community play projects, although they may be conceived as comparatively long-term in community arts terms, (2 years) are, nevertheless, single projects unlike the work of TCA which spanned at least sixteen years throughout which time continuity of approach was maintained by a nucleus of workers. In broad brush terms, community plays exist to produce a performance rather than to be developmental and their broadly celebratory approach leads them to spend comparatively large sums of money on production values (props, costume, set) and to focus their work on a building although this is not usually a theatre. TCA projects, in keeping with their working class ethos, are conceived as street theatre and forego the trappings of naturalism for the immediacy of agit-prop. Where TCA uses theatre instrumentally to provoke discussion of the issues of the play, community plays have the potential to promote debate within the context of a dramaturgically more interesting performance. This is often focused by the widespread use of the promenade performance style which draws the audience into the action and physically takes them with the narrative from place to place within the hall.

Whilst community arts groups like Telford continued to make communal theatre in their own way, others sought to bring community arts principles and practices into the community play movement and set up change from within. TCA's work operated within the community arts ethos but theatrically owed much to agit-prop and the Brechtian tradition <sup>51</sup> where the challenge to the Colway method retained the promenade style as its defining theatrical device and incorporated aspects of Boalian practice into the process. The focus of this development was the Community Department of the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry. After a discussion of the history and development of the community play which centres on the work of Ann Jellicoe and its antecedents in Reminiscence Theatre, the main issues to be pursued in chapter five are focused on a comparison between the work of the Colway Theatre Trust and that of the Belgrade Theatre. This comparison places the two models of practice in their respective traditions of theatre and community arts and explores the tensions between ideas of participation and collaboration; a product, as opposed to a process focus; writing as opposed to devising and the use of historical events rather than contemporary issues as the basis for play projects. Some mention of the international reference points for this work leads to a presentation and discussion of the results of the fieldwork undertaken at Coventry.

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<sup>51</sup> It is interesting that whilst the Colway Theatre Trust commissioned left wing mainstream theatre writers like David Edgar, Telford Community Arts chose to work with radical British Brechtians like John Arden and Margaretta D'Arcy.

# 5

## Communal Theatre

*We are trying to help build communities, not divide them. We feel that co-operating with other people is in itself a political and humanising experience.*

Ann Jellicoe <sup>1</sup>

### **A new form: the community play**

This chapter outlines and presents the results of the fieldwork of the study and is organised in two sections. The first section investigates the history of the community play and the second section deals with the case study of the Belgrade theatre, Coventry.

Under the heading of 'History and Development' the origins of community playmaking are examined and a table of differences between the two principal models is presented. The significant international reference points are plotted

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<sup>1</sup> Jellicoe 1987: 27. My emphasis.

in the form of investigations of Teatro Povero in Italy and of Sidetrack in Australia.

Under the heading of 'Case Study' the second section of the chapter details participant observation of the work of the community department at the Belgrade theatre. This was conducted between 1990 and 1992 and spans two major community plays: In Search of Cofa's Tree (1990) and Diamonds in the Dust (1992). The chapter concludes with an examination of the findings of the case study in the context of the key concepts of this research.

### **Defining the community play**

The definition of a new theatre form is difficult. In the case of the community play this difficulty is compounded by two factors. First, although there are distinct similarities between all of the plays constructed around the Colway Model each of them is significantly different. Second, it is one of the purposes of this study to try and identify a second version of the process - the Belgrade Model. Plainly, the idea of the community play is constantly in development and, because of this continuing evolution, will not admit of a single definition. Nevertheless, attempts have been made and it is important to mark the fact that there is more than one reason for attempting a definition. In the context of a study of this kind it might be argued that the need for a definition is entirely predicated by a philosophical and academic necessity of understanding what we are talking about - trying to find the appropriate



category for the activity. However, practitioners need a definition for more pragmatic reasons. If all, or most, can unite behind, and subsequently publicise, a statement of common purpose then another step up the ladder towards more secure funding will have been taken.<sup>2</sup> In this pragmatic spirit, the 1992 Community Play Conference was offered Open Theatre's working definition in the hope that conference debate would accept, refine and polish it. Richard Hayhow presented the nine-point definition which follows but there was no motion that the conference adopt the definition, indeed there was no agreement that the definition was viable. A strong argument was put against the whole idea of a definition on the grounds that the developing form would be pinned like a butterfly and would immediately cease to evolve. Many arguments were put for extending the definition to encompass an individual's own project which may have involved only twenty people or another which may have been developed over six months. The desire for inclusion was strong but as the series of terms lengthened the definition became so all-embracing that it ceased to be of real use to community play-makers. It widened to include almost all community arts activity.

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<sup>2</sup> Although there is a danger of falling into the trap of what Kelly describes as 'grant-addicted pragmatism' (see chapter four) it is nevertheless recognised that the work will develop if funding bodies can be offered a clear indication of a shared set of references for community plays.

<p>A large cast in the region of 100 people</p> <p>A role for any member of the community who wants to be involved</p> <p>Participation in all areas of the process</p> <p>A core professional team, including writer and director</p> <p>A long set up period (up to two years)</p> <p>A play specially written/adapted for the community and expressing its wishes, needs and concerns, often with a celebratory element</p> <p>An innovative performance style including a role for the audience within the performance</p> <p>A variety of community events and activities happening alongside the play and related to it</p> <p>A commitment to develop future activities after the play</p>
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#### Open Theatre's Definition

Hayhow has since revised his views on the usefulness of this definition and now hopes that community play-makers will be able to find a core of four or five points in the definition which apply to their own project.<sup>3</sup>

### History and Development

In the nineteenth century, Marx and Engels sought to define the authentic portrayal of reality in art and stated that it was only by meeting the real observations of their public that artists could raise the perceptual consciousness of society.  
(Braden 1978: 128)

The appearance of the phenomenon known as the community play is heavily associated with the playwright Ann Jellicoe and the work of the Colway

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<sup>3</sup> Views expressed in a discussion with David Jones, 19 June 1993.

Theatre Trust. Although there is a history of thought and practice in the general area of 'theatre and community' it has been, with the exception of Jellicoe and those who follow the Colway Model, significantly mostly to do with performance and the reception of theatre by an audience rather than with collaboration.

Jellicoe traces the origins of the first community play to two unsuccessful projects; a 1960 commission to write a play for 400 Girl Guides to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of Guiding at the Empire Pool, Wembley; and the creation of 'a play or happening, which was to involve resources and people from all over the county' (Jellicoe 1987: 2) to mark the opening of the law courts in Winchester. Neither event happened in the way it was intended. The Winchester project was the victim of financial restraint but the Guide play (The Rising Generation 1967) was rejected, according to Christopher Innes, 'on the grounds of its orgiastic feminism' (Innes 1992: 420).

I wrote a play which involved all the older women in the world suppressing men and finally destroying the earth with an atomic bomb - the Empire Pool then turned into a spaceship and flew away.

(Jellicoe 1987: 2)

Jellicoe, wryly describing the play as 'this modest, unassuming, optimistic little piece' (Jellicoe 1987: 2) only hints at the reasons for its rejection but, in terms of the history of the community play, its sheer scope and scale is more interesting. It was to have been performed as part of a large public celebration and would have involved a very large cast of amateurs working alongside 'a few professional actors for the main parts' (Jellicoe 1987: 2). At this time the

theatre profession had not clarified its thinking on this kind of partnership. Although some Regional Arts Associations had schemes which encouraged the employment of visiting professionals, especially directors, to work with amateur dramatic groups, Equity was loath to agree to mixed amateur and professional casts arguing that it denied its members jobs.<sup>4</sup> Jellicoe's Girl Guide commission can be seen to contain the seeds of a working practice which had not yet found a context. Both of these projects were play commissions and must therefore be seen as part of the mainstream theatre machinery of the country rather than as radical community projects. Their potential function was not, in Braden's phrase, 'to meet the real observations of their public' (Braden 1978:128) but simply to use art instrumentally to mark a social event. It is doubtful whether their scale was seen as an integral part of their community function but more as an opportunity which conventional theatre companies cannot afford. This aspect was picked up by Michael Billington in his review of Changing Places (1992). The community play, he says:

.. in my experience has a liberating effect on dramatists. Freed from the economic handcuffs of professional theatre, they are positively encouraged to write big.  
(Billington 28.5.1992)

Marking a social event is different from entering into a collaboration with members of the community and the nature of the relationship between professional theatre workers and the 'public/community' who have been

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<sup>4</sup> It might be argued that this kind of trade union protectionism was one of the factors which led to the production-side only role of professional theatre workers in later community plays. This Equity attitude persisted for many years and was still in evidence when I directed a community project in Steeple Aston, Oxfordshire, for Oxfordshire Touring Theatre Company in 1984-85. It effectively prevented members of the community from treading the same boards as the professional company.

involved in community plays is central to an understanding of the right of community play organisers to use the word 'community' in their titles.

## Early developments

Jellicoe's early plays in this vein mark a departure for three reasons. First, she quit London and the London theatre thus taking her art to the people rather than feeding an established theatre-going audience with the fruits of her labours as Literary Manager at The Royal Court; second, her first real experiment with community plays (The Reckoning Lyme Regis 1978) was not formally commissioned, it came from her reaction to her changed circumstances; and, third, she chose a theatrical style, promenade, which, by relating form to content, offered enormous potential for both collaboration and participation. The promenade style upsets the audience's pre-conceived notion of the division of theatre space between actor and audience and allows the play to appear to emerge spontaneously from the midst of what appears to be the setting up. Jellicoe quotes Baz Kershaw's description, for Theatre Ireland, of the Colyford play:

... the initial impression on arriving for the show is one of chaos ... the only seating - for older people - is in short rows on rostra scattered round the edge of the space. The rest of us must stand and promenade, following the action round and between the four stages ... so the subdued order of traditional theatre is replaced by a confused hubbub of activity, a re-creation of Colyford's old Goose Fair ... The play, then, does not so much *begin* as *grow out of* the fair, the first scene starting amid the combined chatter of the audience and performers.  
(Jellicoe 1987: xv)

To animate her concept she approached the head of her local comprehensive school and 'asked if he would like me to write a play for them' (Jellicoe 1987: 3). On this evidence The Reckoning did not arise from a community-perceived need or desire for a play but, given its pioneering status, this may be an unreasonable expectation. However, Jellicoe's account of the school's reception of the possibility shows that her first community were both uncertain and uneasy about the prospect. Having written a very large-scale play with the children, their parents and other adults in mind as the cast, she presented it to the school who indicated that it was too large a project for them. This rejection forced the creation of a partnership which has become the mould for the majority of community plays now produced.

I had formed a web of contacts through my work on the Drama Panel of South West Arts and was thus able to go to the University of Exeter Drama Department for help with stage management. Medium Fair, our local professional theatre company, was also keen to be involved, as were the Lyme Regis Amateur Dramatic Society, so I went back to the school with a package.

(Jellicoe 1987: 3)

An idea born in the possibility of a collaboration between 400 Guides and a few professional actors in the Empire Pool, Wembley came to life as a partnership of a regional arts association, an amateur dramatic club, a professional theatre company, a university, a school and its community. The developing community play can, at this stage, be seen to have three key aspects which may mark it out as a new force in theatre:

1. the partnership of agencies which combine to put it on
2. its power to involve large numbers of people who are not simply 'audience'

### 3. its distinctive style of stage presentation

Whilst the structure of this partnership was as new as the concept of the play being undertaken, Jellicoe's account of the process of production of The Reckoning matches the experience of many schoolteachers doing theatre work with their pupils. Attempting to involve all and sundry has the twin aims of eliciting contributions and gifts of all sorts and of generating a buzz of interest in the project as a whole. School drama has long known and used these techniques: Jellicoe discovered them in 1978.

By involving themselves people were helping to create a work of art, giving and sharing towards an idealistic aim. Amazing energy was being released, and people felt good doing it. There was an air of friendliness and supportiveness amongst the cast and helpers.

(Jellicoe 1987: 4/5)

At the National One-Day Community Play Conference held in November 1992 Richard Hayhow, of Open Theatre, asserted that 'people began to do community plays in the mid-seventies'<sup>5</sup> and whilst this is substantially true, it nevertheless reveals a problem of description and terminology. It would be more appropriate to say that, in the mid-seventies, people began to *describe* what they were doing as a community play since the roots of this kind of work are diverse and spring, in part, from the branch of theatre we now call 'Reminiscence Theatre'. This was significantly developed in the Exe Valley in the early 1970's by Medium Fair and Fair Old Times and documented by Dr Gordon Langley, Nick Sales and Baz Kershaw.<sup>6</sup> Their aims, as outlined in the *Theatre Papers*, are directed towards 'the consequences of ageing in this

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<sup>5</sup> From Hayhow's opening remarks at the conference which was organised by Open Theatre Company.

culture' (Langley & Kershaw 1981: 3) but clearly transfer to the populace in general. It will be noted later in this chapter that very many community play texts identify themes which reflect turmoil and disjuncture and require the participation of actor and audience in the restoration of stability or hope. Some of the principles discovered by Fair Old Times and, later, Medium Fair have been picked up, probably in part through Kershaw's involvement in the development of community performance, by most groups and organisations who have undertaken this kind of community play project since. As Langley and Kershaw argue:

Social horizons, temporarily, possibly for longer, are extended and pleasure is given and received. Past and present are linked, values adjusted accordingly and perception levelled to a new and potentially more stable whole. In primitive societies the aged storyteller hands down the culture to the new generation.

(Langley & Kershaw 1981: 3)

There is no sense in which, the work of Fair Old Times would be described as a community play but it, and the set of theatrical conventions it used, brought forward the idea that theatre could be made collaboratively with the audience - a concept referred to by this study as *communal theatre*. It works by finding ways not only of reflecting people's experiences back to them but also of entering into a collective or communal remembrance and interrogation of social circumstances. Kershaw describes the Colyford play Colyford Matters (Colyford, East Devon 1983) in the following manner - 'we feel that we are not so much looking *at* the nineteenth century, but are still, somehow, a part of it' (Jellicoe 1987: xv). The balance between the ideas of remembrance and

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<sup>6</sup> See Langley & Kershaw 1981.



interrogation became, over time, one of the most significant foci of debate about the process of community playmaking and in many ways can be seen to mark the differences between gradualist and aesthetic materialist approaches to the work. Activities which simply reflect the past, produce performance which is purely celebratory and pageant-like; they offer, in Kelly's terms, only secondary understandings. However, activities which incorporate questioning attitudes have the potential to move from celebration to provocation <sup>7</sup> and can offer the opportunity to develop primary understandings. In this sense, these latter can be genuinely culturally democratic.

It is part of the contention of this study that various theatrical and therapeutic experiments pursued in the South West during the 1970s led to the appearance of a specific form of theatre which was based on a combination of reminiscence and historical research. As a result of the coming together in 1977 of Medium Fair, who had been involved in participatory community projects, and Ann Jellicoe, a playwright who had been Literary Manager of the Royal Court Theatre between 1972 and 1974, community plays, in the specific formulation and context which is of interest to this study, emerged in 1978 with Ann Jellicoe's play, The Reckoning, for Lyme Regis. Community plays were first quantified in 1987 with the publication of Jellicoe's handbook, *Community Plays: how to put them on* which became a kind of orthodox practice for the new form and has been the blueprint for many similar events

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<sup>7</sup> See Jones 1994/95.

and, possibly, the beginning of a movement.

The project which led to the presentation of The Reckoning was a great popular success in Lyme Regis, and it became a model for the production of more large-scale events; moreover, the model has been adopted and adapted by many towns and villages, so that nine years after The Reckoning Ann Jellicoe could write confidently:

All over the country community plays are being produced. Now they are being set up abroad. The movement is flourishing.  
(Jellicoe 1987: 41)

Almost inevitably a large part of the early history of the community play is the history of Ann Jellicoe's work and thought.<sup>8</sup> After the first experiment with The Reckoning she set up a limited company - the Colway Theatre Trust - expressly to produce community plays. She has to date organised at least twenty community plays, some of which have been developed in two countries simultaneously and all of which use the model she created in 1978.

## **Socialism in action ?**

Kenneth Tynan once, rather patronisingly, dismissed amateur theatre as an exhibitionist alternative to bridge; but the community play, when it works, is socialism in action.  
(Billington 28.5.1992)

As Billington's comment indicates, community plays have the ability to inspire sentimental reactions in their audiences. This is, perhaps, to be expected from

some ordinary members of the audience but is a little more surprising in a seasoned theatre critic. Comments like this seem to indicate that a slightly different critical stance is being taken. Critics reviewing London theatre do not usually comment on process or on the wider aspects of play production but Billington's statement that 'it is the event itself, as much as the play, that moves one' (Billington 28.5.1992) indicates that there is something about the event itself which seems to alter people's reactions.

A principal element of the early experiments conducted by Jellicoe which was to become part of the Colway Model was the promenade staging.

... there was enough seating for about a third of the audience. Much of the action took place on the floor amongst the promenading audience but there were also three raised stages for important scenes.

(Jellicoe 1987: 5)

The promenade style, which disguises the boundaries between the playing area and the audience, also successfully draws the audience closer to the events of the play and enhances the possibility of catharsis<sup>9</sup> through empathy for the audience. This centrally important connection between form and content accounts for much of the feeling of inclusiveness at promenade-style community plays. As Jellicoe puts it:

I think a great deal of the success of The Reckoning and of subsequent plays was that we found a physical form which

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<sup>8</sup> There are a few other initiatives of a similar kind which date from the late 70's - early 80's (Roy Nevitt's Living Archive Project at Milton Keynes; Rupert Creed and Averil Coult's Remould Theatre Company in Hull - est. 1981) but they are largely in the existing tradition of Documentary Theatre. Telford Community Arts and Avon Community Theatre Agency work within a community arts framework and All Change Arts in London postdates Jellicoe's early work.

<sup>9</sup> The challenge, which later community plays (Bridlington, for example) took up is how to balance the inclusiveness of the form with non-naturalistic sequences which promote *Verfremdung*.

reinforced the idea of involvement.  
(Jellicoe 1987: 5)

Promenade is now an almost standard feature of community plays as this programme note from the 1992 Woking play affirms.

This is a promenade performance and is designed to be viewed from the centre of the hall. You will enjoy it most if you stand on the floor and follow the action from stage to stage.  
(Changing Places 1992)

Post-Ibsen naturalistic theatre is seen as being about absorption and emotional identification and Colway Model community plays use this as part of a community-forming process. 'If you are surrounded by people who are wrapped up in a play and excited by it you become excited too' (Jellicoe 1987:

5). Kershaw has described this as *implicit barter*:

Virtually all the activities surrounding the setting up of a performance are ... an expression of community: so you might say that performance is exchanged for community, or that the community invests itself in performance.  
(Jellicoe 1987: xvii)

In addition to presenting the audience with an innovative staging, community plays also tend to challenge the traditional notion of where and when the play itself begins. Most use the dramatic reconstruction of an historical period as their structure and lend themselves to being surrounded with the paraphernalia of fairs, carnivals and markets. The unsuspecting audience are quite likely to find themselves in a kind of postmodern market where actors from the play and others, dressed in period costume, are staffing stalls which sell side by side old-fashioned comestibles, fruit and 20th century screenprinted tee-shirts, posters and badges advertising the play itself.

Indeed, it may also be possible to buy copies of a book about the play process which includes the text or a video recording of the performance before you enter the theatre.

"Are you audience ?" an old lady challenged me as cast and spectators promenaded before the start. For once I felt rather sorry I had to say yes.  
(Billington 28.5.1992)

In the case of Changing Places (Woking, 1992), the dramaturgical 'confusion' about the play's starting point was used to draw in the audience by the presentation of an issue of the local paper, the 'Woking News and Mail' dated Friday August 7, 1914. Members of the audience who take the bait offered by the innovatory dramatic form are caught on the hook of the play's content which goes beyond documentary into Jellicoe's real territory - that of using theatre as a symbol of and catalyst for the creation of a community. Critics who view the piece from a purely documentary historical position, miss the point.

The play is set in the decade 1910-1920 and, frankly, this is too narrow a timespan to do the place justice. Woking may not have a history to rival, for example, Paris and London, but much of the history it does have goes unacknowledged here.  
(Gibby 25.6.1992)

Jellicoe uses the focus of the war and the rise of the Suffragettes to tell parallel stories about women divided by class. She indicates that women in particular, and the whole of Woking by extension, can achieve their goals - suffrage and community. Instead of expressing the town's existing sense of identity, Changing Places seems to be an attempt to forge one: to remind people that Woking ... has a shared, collective past. (Billington 28.5.1992)

## The Colway Theatre Trust model

Although built round a 'core' of professionals ... Ann Jellicoe's productions arise out of the resources, interests and needs of the community for and by which they're created.

(Edgar 1988: introduction)

I was aware of the huge commitment, I knew it would take twelve months of my working life, I was also aware of the awesome responsibility.

(Terson 1990: 9)

Community plays are about communities and their relationships with professional theatre workers and they cannot be set up quickly.

CTT generally allows 2 years, but the process can be condensed into 18 months.

(Jellicoe 1987: 49)

There are two main reasons for this. First, the relationship needs to be established in a way which, given the peculiarities of the situation, is genuine; and second, funds need to be raised.<sup>10</sup> The Colway model charts a critical path from early conversations between 'the initiator' and the Trust, which take place in the early months of the first year, through to the performances and the clearing up in November of the second year. This length, according to Jellicoe, is governed by the needs of the writer, whose research, writing and re-writing period should run from the commission date in June of the year 1 for a minimum of 8-9 months but preferably until May of year 2 when the script should be delivered. There is a steering committee, probably chaired by 'the initiator', which is formed right at the beginning and a fundraising

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<sup>10</sup> Ann Jellicoe's *The Reckoning* (Lyne Regis 1978) cost £2,233.67 although this is an artificially depressed figure because most of the professionals were paid only token sums. By 1986/7 Jellicoe's guide budget had risen to £29,683. The production budget for *Diamonds in the Dust* (Belgrade, Coventry 1992) was in the region of £41,000. During the 1990s these projects can cost about £80,000. (Figures from Jellicoe (1987) and from minutes of the Coventry Community Play 1992 Steering Group June 29 1992.)

committee which is created approximately nine months later. In year 2 a play office is opened and public meetings are held to 'raise consciousness', a director for the play is appointed six months before the performances and by June the play is cast and rehearsals begin in September. There follow three months of intensive production work leading to two weeks of performances in November.

The drive is very much towards the public presentation at the end and towards the achievement of high standards. Community plays which use the Colway Model import with them similar structures and product-focused attitudes. In the Colway Model, the writer is essential and professionals know best about creating performance. As Jellicoe says:

We all delude ourselves as to our creative merits ... if local people do everything, its axiomatic that the artistic standard will be lower than if professionals are called in. (Jellicoe 1987: 54/4)

It is certainly true that Ann Jellicoe produces theatrical performances of a very high standard from her amateur casts but some community play practitioners and participants have questioned, amongst other things, the primacy of the writer and the nature of the experience of the non-professionals in Colway Model community plays. These criticisms raise the issue of the differences between participation and collaboration.

## **The Belgrade model**

There are two important differences between the Colway Theatre Trust and the Belgrade theatre:

1. The Belgrade Theatre is a venue - a producing house which has a

community department. It is not a freelance theatre organisation which can respond to a need anywhere in its region (or, indeed, in the world).

2. The theatre is in Coventry city centre which makes its choice of community problematic. It does not have the ready-made rural middle classes which support Colway model plays.

These differences of situation have inevitably lead to an adaptation of the Colway model. Indeed, community play practice at the Belgrade has arisen as a development of the outreach work of the community department. It is not their only activity and has been informed by their previous work and contacts.<sup>11</sup> Another factor in this evolution is human. Richard Hayhow, who was drama director of Worcester Arts Centre, had been seconded to the Colway Theatre Trust to train for setting up the Worcester Community Play, which he directed. He then went on to direct both the Lincoln and Banbury plays and was subsequently appointed as consultant to the 1990 Coventry community play.

The Belgrade model, which is still in development, has been able to be refined because the theatre is the only other organisation <sup>12</sup> which has produced two community plays in the same location. Its main principles can be discerned from a study of the organisational structure and the aims and objectives of the Steering Group for the 1992 community play. Aims 5 and 6 state:

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<sup>11</sup> See, later in this chapter, a short history of the work of the community department.

<sup>12</sup> CTT has produced two plays in Lyme Regis (1978, 1984); Remould's work, as previously indicated, belongs to the documentary theatre tradition and is spread across their region.



5. To explore in more depth the process of writing and creating the play. To start with nothing and create something. To truly represent the views and ideas of people as well as creating a play that is dramatic and exciting.

6. To help take the 'mystery' out of theatre but keep its excitement and challenge; and make it into something that anyone can get involved in, particularly people who have had little access to the theatre.<sup>13</sup>

In practice, this meant that a group of people who had been centrally involved in In Search of Cofa's Tree (Coventry: 1990) determined the nature of the relationship between the self-selected community (themselves) and the theatre and entered into informal contracts with the members of the Belgrade Community department who were co-ordinating the project. Regular devising workshops were set up and the familiar pattern of fund-raising began. However, at the heart of the project, the decision not to engage a writer was such a substantial departure from Colway practice, (and indeed from In Search of Cofa's Tree) that there was great potential for a genuine transfer of ownership from the organisers to the participants.

## Differences between the two models

The purpose of making comparisons of the two models is to further the understanding and development of the form. There is no criticism of Ann Jellicoe or the Colway model intended or implied. Indeed, Jellicoe herself said in 1992 that she was unsure about how the concept can, or should, be

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<sup>13</sup> See Appendix 18 for the full list of aims and objectives of the 1992 project.

developed.<sup>14</sup> She has always maintained that her book simply sets out her own practice and was not intended as a blueprint:

This book seeks to provide a model: you can imitate its practice or create your own.  
(Jellicoe 1987: xviii)

The table that follows brings together the principle differences between the two models in the terms of this study and is expressed as a series of intentions rather than a set of absolute oppositions.

Colway Model	Belgrade Model
Is written	Is devised
Is in the mainstream theatre tradition	Is in the community arts tradition
Is largely historical	Is largely issue-based
Is product-focused	Is process-focused
Uses participation	Explores collaboration
Is community theatre	Is communal theatre

The key to the debate about differences between the two models lies in perceptions of ownership. The table above, if taken at face value, can be interpreted on the four-legs-good-two-legs-bad principle to mean that the

<sup>14</sup> From a discussion with David Jones at the National One-Day Community Play Conference, 7 November 1992.

Colway Theatre Trust, the *ancien regime*, is not morally correct and somehow disadvantages its participants. This view, however, simply does not recognise the different genesis of each model. Nor does it take account of the twin advantages of the Belgrade model. First, the Belgrade was able to capitalise on the pioneering experiments of the Colway tradition and, recognising some of the problems, change the emphasis of their projects to suit their own policy objectives. Second, the Belgrade team was able to use its very separateness from the Colway Theatre Trust to be objective. The Belgrade community department took Jellicoe at her word and created their own practice. Moreover, the table does not reveal the fact that the Belgrade model has itself evolved. The version above refers to their second community play - the first bore some remarkable similarities to the Colway model. Indeed, the production team in the Belgrade's community department have indicated that there may be a necessary sequence of events which enables the Belgrade model to take place, the first part of which is the successful completion of a Colway model play. Janice Dunn, director/deviser of Diamonds in the Dust (Coventry, 1992), has said that the second play could only have succeeded by being part of a process which began with In Search of Cofa's Tree (Coventry, 1990).<sup>15</sup> This is a straightforward recognition of one Jellicoe's key principles:

At its simplest the process boils down to credibility: can you deliver and convince other people that you can? To discovering how to involve people in creating a work of art, and where to draw the line between the needs of the community and the needs of art.  
(Jellicoe 1987: xviii)

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<sup>15</sup> From an interview with David Jones at rehearsal for Diamonds in the Dust, 15 June 1992.

For each community which commits itself to a community play, there is a journey through uncharted waters. The only guides can be theatre professionals and part of their function is to instil confidence in the participants. Ann Jellicoe argues that a vital component of that journey is the security provided by a script from a competent writer. Thus the Colway model involves a commission which makes it a full-blooded, if largely amateur, part of the mainstream presentational theatre tradition of the country. The existence of such a script conditions the nature of the participants' involvement. They are cast, rehearsed and directed in a play which has been constructed by a group of theatre professionals from research about their community. The texts often use the distancing device of historicisation to try and bind people together in a way which provides or, at the very least reaffirms, community identity. The primary purpose of the whole enterprise is to present the play in performance - it is heavily product-focused and the end result of all these factors places the Colway model play in the realm of community theatre. Theatre made for the community by professionals.

The Belgrade model substitutes a group devising process for the pre-written script and is arguably therefore in the participatory tradition of Community Arts. As Appendix 18 shows the participants make a contract with the professionals which involves the transmission of their skills *on the participants' terms*. The feeling is very much of the professionals being drawn

upon by the participants and the activity therefore is a collaborative one where ownership remains with the participants. The collaborative approach allows the group to eschew historicisation and confront what concerns them in their community at that time - their play is licensed to be issue-based. This construction necessarily involves considerable emphasis on process as the participants, with the guidance of the professionals, explore the conflict issues which are of importance to them and find appropriate dramatic symbols to represent those conflicts. These factors, when drawn together make *communal theatre* an appropriate description for a community play which follows the Belgrade Model.

Both models can be examined for their contribution to aesthetic justice via the medium of communal theatre if they are measured against the forms of empowerment outlined in the Introduction. Each project, regardless of the principles on which it is organised, can be analysed as to its position on the continuum between participation and collaboration, according to the levels of democracy manifest within it, its hierarchies of relationship, the perceived ability of the participants to influence the project as a whole and the skill of the workers in demystifying their art. The study pursues this analysis later in this chapter when the results of the fieldwork are assessed.

### **International reference points**

Community performance takes many forms and exists in most cultures. In

this country it can be traced back to the religious drama of the Guilds:

... evidence is overwhelming that the common people responded to the plays with enthusiasm and devotion perhaps unmatched in the history of the theater. The trained critic of the drama has assumed that the explanation for this fact cannot be found in artistic excellence.

(Prosser 1961: 3)

It has also surfaced, in sometimes jingoistic form, as community celebration.

In my youth we didn't have community plays, we had pageants ... the Warwickshire Coronation Pageant in 1953 ... viewed local history from an explicitly royalist standpoint.

(Billington 28.5.1992)

In other countries, the religious influence is as strong as the traditions it has engendered. The York Cycle, the Coventry Mysteries and the Passion at Oberammergau are clear examples of some aspects of this performance practice. Richard Andrews has been studying the regular community drama activity of the Teatro Povero <sup>16</sup> in the Italian village of Monticchiello since 1983 <sup>17</sup> and he is clear that, within their context, these events are without parallel.

The annual *autodrammi* of Monticchiello in Italy constitute a unique theatrical, social and even political phenomenon.

(Andrews 1991: 77)

His researches would seem to indicate that, in a European context, he has discovered a new form of theatre - in his words 'a form of drama which has no contemporary equivalent' (Andrews 1991:77), but it may be the cultural context or the form of organisation which is new. Andrews writes of the social and cultural frustrations which are part of the background to the plays and

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<sup>16</sup> This community has been presenting annual theatre pieces which reflect its experience since 1967. Andrews has been engaged in a study of the phenomenon since 1967 and has written an earlier article 'Observing Italian Theatre' in the *University of Leeds Review* XXIX (1986-7) pp.7-25.

describes the peasants of the region as a class which had been 'isolated, marginalised, despised, ignored' (Andrews 1991: 77). He also categorises the dramas as texts which are so specific that they can only be performed by the Monticchiellesi. However, it may well be that the organisers of community plays in Britain would find much of their own work to recognise in such descriptions. The desire to 'enfranchise' or 'value' marginalised groups within our society could sit well as an aim for the animator of a community play of either the Colway or Belgrade models and it is certainly true that the eventual texts produced are highly community-specific. There are considerable similarities between the concept of the community dramas of Monticchiello and the idea of the Belgrade Model of community play in Britain. The principal similarity would seem to be in the attempted relationship between form and content - the potentially "validating" aspect of communal theatre:

One of the things which *autodrammi* have regularly evoked is that very deprivation which Teatro Povero was created to remedy - the peasants lack of a voice, of words with which to state their case, to fend off the arguments of their exploiters, to take some degree of control over their own destiny.

Andrews 1991: 80)

Andrews makes further claims for the uniqueness of the work of the Teatro Povero and sites it between the Colway model and the Mysteries.

Everyone concerned in the production is either from the village or from very close by: this is not an Italian equivalent of David Edgar or Ann Jellicoe descending from the metropolis on Dorchester to show its citizens what to think about their own history. On the other hand, the dramaturgy is by now contemporary and

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<sup>17</sup> See Andrews 1991: 77-96.

sophisticated - this is not an Italian Oberammergau, preserving a museum text of folk art.

(Andrews 1991: 78) <sup>18</sup>

It remains true that there appears to be little evidence, beyond the work of Andrews, of similar ventures in other cultures.

## Clerks of the records

The work of Sidetrack in Australia and of Telford Community Arts in Shropshire although superficially similar are, nevertheless, in a different category which relates far more closely to the Belgrade Model than it does to the Colway Model. Burvill <sup>19</sup> provides a powerful ideological link between the *autodrammi* of Monticchiello and the work of Sidetrack. He quotes John Berger's novel - *A Fortunate Man*:

Berger's idea ... of the doctor John Sassall as a 'clerk of the records' of his rural community - one who can speak what most in his deprived community cannot fully articulate - seems to me to catch part of Sidetrack's aim. (Burvill 1986: 88)

This is clearly very similar to Andrews notion of the *autodrammi* as opportunities for 'finding a voice' and is also reminiscent of Freire and Boal, but it is what Burvill goes on to say which, again at the level of ideology, indicates connections with the Belgrade approach. Sidetrack want to use

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<sup>18</sup> Andrews makes a powerful point concerning ownership of the Monticchiello texts which can be seen as one of the most important differences in principle, if not necessarily in actuality, between the Colway and Belgrade models. In a footnote (p.95) relating to the above quotation he says:

*Entertaining Strangers* was a positive and fruitful dramatic experiment; but I have heard David Edgar admit that the participants were largely middle-class residents who had migrated to Dorchester, and that 'native' inhabitants of longer standing took little part or interest in the project. Monticchiello's *autodrammi*, by contrast, are firmly in the control of the village's native population.

However, this simplifies the argument too much and fails to take account of the relative populations of Dorchester and Monticchiello and their widely differing locations.

<sup>19</sup> See Burvill 1986: 80-89.



theatre to reveal what they see as the 'damage being done to people by the existing social structure' (Burvill 1986: 88) and, more importantly, they want to make points about pluralism versus individualism. Sidetrack, according to Burvill:

... recognises the psychological deprivation and alienation of life under capitalism, and our society's inability genuinely to value individual lives in other than commodity-like terms.  
(Burvill 1986: 88)

What the company does not do is work with the collaboration of their target communities. Where the inhabitants of Monticchiello constitute the only possible cast for their plays which are animated by a dramaturg and a director, the cast of Sidetrack's plays are professional actors who have made their plays in the community they are studying. The peasants of Monticchiello are *themselves* finding a voice with very little professional assistance; the community of the Chullora Railway Workshops in western Sydney, which was the focus of Sidetrack's Loco, have their voice *found for them* by the theatre company. The political aim is the same - the creation of a better, more just, more human society - but the participation in the process is different. Sidetrack are the Australian equivalent of the core professional team which the Colway and Belgrade Models both require but they do not engage the community in their work except as research material.

It is clear from this examination of the history and range of practice that it is hard to find an all-embracing definition of the community play. It is the contention of this analysis, therefore, that it is more instructive to assess

forms of participatory theatre according to the concept of communal theatre as this study proposes.

## Case Study

We've had a playscheme now a community play is what we want to get everyone together.

(Woodruff 1989: 371) <sup>22</sup>

The success of this movement, if it can be identified as such, across the country meant that, at the inception of this study, there was a large selection of Colway Model community plays to choose a case study from. Open Theatre's Carnegie Foundation-funded study of community plays identified eighteen examples of the form, mostly using the Colway Model, in various stages of research, preparation or production, in 1990. The critical stance of this study was originally designed to challenge some key aspects of Jellicoe's approach and, in order properly to conceptualise the community play, it was necessary to search for an organisation which was using a different, less overtly cathartic Aristotelian dramaturgy.

According to Burvill, although Brecht's thinking remains a 'relevant point of departure', it is difficult to see what

...is the appropriate *form* for these ideas in the historical circumstances we face, some fifty odd years down the track from the

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<sup>20</sup> Although there is a danger of falling into the trap of what Kelly describes as 'grant-addicted pragmatism' (see chapter four) it is nevertheless recognised that the work will develop if funding bodies can be offered a clear indication of a shared set of references for community plays.

<sup>21</sup> Views expressed in a discussion with David Jones, 19 June 1993.

<sup>22</sup> Woodruff is quoting a member of the Tipton community association.

fascist crisis within which Brecht articulated his priorities and strategies.

(Burvill 1986: 81) <sup>23</sup>

Studying community play texts one could be forgiven for assuming that their authors mostly inhabit a dramaturgical world which has not been influenced by Brecht at all. This assumption is supported in three ways. First, in content terms they invite identification through largely linear narrative with strong characters whose dramatic power is enhanced for the local community because of their documentary background. Second, from the point of view of form, the community play's adoption of promenade staging, positively demands strong audience involvement. To take one of the fixed seats, unless elderly or infirm, is deliberately, and publicly, to deny yourself the involvement which the play exists to promote.<sup>24</sup> Third, and most important, although least obvious, are the socio-cultural undertones of the community play phenomenon. The plays are commonly perceived as existing in order to promote community and, if this argument is taken, there is a powerful equation between the needs of play production and the cultural need to 'restore' community to the 'postmodern wilderness' of our society. Both tasks call for the resurrection of a kind of theatrical 'Dunkirk spirit' and people join together, backs against the wall, to stage a juggernaut of a play with a cast and crew of between 150 and 250 people. This effort is, at one and the same time, directed towards the retrieval

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<sup>23</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>24</sup> However, community playmakers have identified a need to find strategies which teach the audience to promenade in the early moments of the play or risk creating a large group of people who simply stand in the centre.

of a sense of community which appears to be lost in the 1950s of our collective memory.

If ever a city needed to re-create some of that same spirit to continue the regeneration, Coventry needs it now. The point of commemorating 1940 is to be optimistic about the 1990s.  
(Hamblin 1989) <sup>25</sup>

It is not surprising that Ann Jellicoe can claim to prove that community plays change your life.

Here was art which touched everyone in the community to some degree and by means of which some people changed their attitudes and lives. I have letters to prove it; people tell me it is so; I see it in their faces, attitudes and actions.  
(Jellicoe 1987: 9)

However, as the previous quotation indicates and Kershaw further identifies:

Jellicoe has never overtly professed an ideologically radical position, though her plays demonstrate egalitarian sympathies. These mostly take the form of a liberated attitude to sexuality and an untheorised feminism, both reminiscent of 1960s counter-culture.  
(Kershaw 1992: 186)

The need of the present research was for a case study of a community play which attempted to grapple with the problems of post-Brechtian form indicated by Burvill: a study which might answer some of the questions about ownership and class put to the Colway model by theatre writers and practitioners of the left. The case study should focus on the use of dramatic form to symbolise and express the experience and views of the participants and the siting of control of the creative process. The model of practice developed in Coventry offered an opportunity to quantify the challenges to the Colway Model.

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<sup>25</sup> Quotation from *Coventry Blitz Community Play* - a paper prepared for Coventry City Council.

## The Coventry community play tradition

A Community Play is seen as a catalyst in building civic spirit and awareness within a community. Local people share in performance subject matter about their own community with an audience from that community. It includes all ages in the process.

(Hamblin 1989)

The Belgrade Theatre, Coventry is a 600 seat regional repertory theatre which was built as part of the regeneration of the city and named in a spirit of international co-operation. Its historic significance arises from the fact that it was the first new theatre to be built in Britain after the war. It has a staff of about 100 who, in addition to producing theatre for a main house and a studio, has a well established theatre-in-education team, a youth theatre and a community department.

The community department aims broadly to use the tools of the community arts movement; participation in all areas of theatre production and de-mystification of the arts of theatre to bridge the gap between theatre and community and to contribute to raising the city's opinion of itself. The detailed means of achieving these aims varies according to the particular project being undertaken but it is certainly true that in 1989, as the community department was evolving, <sup>26</sup> it had decided that projects such as major community plays were an all-encompassing way of furthering its aims. Aims which fit closely

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<sup>26</sup> The Community Department was formed in 1985 and the director, Robert Hamblin, viewed the 1990 Community Play as an important part of its development.

The Belgrade ... has the professional experience, expertise, resources and personnel to be the base for producing a COVENTRY BLITZ COMMUNITY PLAY, and to be the logical base for a permanent community theatre initiative as the next stage of its Community Department development.

(Hamblin 1989)

with the theatre directorate's view of the Belgrade as part of a community-responsive arts facility for Coventry.

Through the Community Play the Belgrade extends evens further its wide-ranging service to Coventry. Our job is to make the Belgrade a theatre that belongs in the widest possible sense to everyone in Coventry.

(Hamblin 1989)

The community department's specific agenda, which covered areas such as:

1. networking with existing community groups
2. work with ethnic minority groups
3. the development of an Equal Opportunities Policy
4. providing opportunities for people with special needs

could all be tackled, it was felt, to a greater or lesser extent within a major project. The process of establishing a community play practice has evolved under the, then head of community department, Jane Hytch, and effectively began<sup>27</sup> with The Sanctuary, a small-scale open-air Youth Theatre project involving about 60 young people and directed by Keiran Gillespie, the Youth Theatre Director. This was followed by In Search of Cofa's Tree (1990) by Richard Osborne which was the Belgrade's first large-scale community play and subsequently by Diamonds in the Dust (1992 - devised).

### **The 1990 Belgrade community play**

This project, conceived as the Belgrade's response to the City Blitz Commemorations, began in October 1989 and was staged in November 1990.

Osborne's play conformed in many particulars to the Colway model although it was theatre building-based and existed, at least in part because of the 50th anniversary of the Blitz. In this latter respect it shared some of the formal properties of the Bristol Old Vic Community Play (A Town in the West Country) and invoked overtly a sense of a community pulling together. It was certainly the product of a writer although there was a considerable amount of community-based research work and devising, and the Belgrade itself viewed the play as part of the general theatre tradition.

Community Plays are a new phenomenon of British Repertory Theatre. ...in recent years (they) have taken place in theatres, providing audiences with a fresh and challenging form of theatre.  
(Hamblin 1989)

It used participation, involving a number of devising groups in the process and was determinedly historical, offering, albeit along with a critique, a panorama of the emergence and development of the city. It was product-focussed community theatre, conforming to one of the Community Department's aims:

To use the professional expertise of the Belgrade Theatre Coventry ... to ensure that community theatre in Coventry is of the highest possible standard.  
Hamblin 1989)

It began outside the theatre in Belgrade Square with the traditional market-cum-fair, it had a cast of 150 and took an historical look at the trials and tribulations of Coventry people.

Nearly 1,500 years ago, on the banks of the river Sherbourne a settlement grew up in the shade of Cofa's Tree. In 1016 it was destroyed by King Canute and thus began the many cycles of

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<sup>27</sup> A previous Belgrade commission Risky City by Ron Hutchinson is clearly a mainstream, main house play about the people of Coventry but may mark the beginnings of an in-house interest in making theatre of relevance to its community.

destruction and rebirth in Coventry's long history. Devised in six areas of the city, this epic rollercoaster ride through Coventry's folklore describes some of the very real problems and achievements that Coventry people have experienced since the Blitz.

(In Search of Cofa's Tree - publicity handbill)

The play was created using a federation of six geographically separate areas of the city - Bell Green, Coundon, Earlsdon, Hillfields, Stoke and Willenhall. Each area had its own series of regular drama devising workshops which were run by three co-directors. The play's author/director moved between all of the workshops and the results were structured as a kind of kit of parts, developed and rehearsed in the six community centres, and then slotted together in the final rehearsal period at the Belgrade itself.

From this evidence it can be seen that In Search of Cofa's Tree was a version of a Colway Model community play although one or two important differences are apparent. First, an examination of its aims shows that the Community Department bases its work in community arts practice and, second, there was from the outset an intention to set in train a larger process of which this play was a part.

A one-off community play is worthwhile. Much more valuable is a long term community theatre programme that gives local people the ongoing opportunity for self-expression.

(Hamblin 1989)

These considerations made it clear that the Belgrade would make a suitable case study and initial contact was made with the community department in the spring of 1990 during the research period for Osborne's In Search of Cofa's Tree. A meeting was held with the head of the department and the director of the youth theatre to negotiate the scale of my involvement. It was plain that



there was a fundamental difference of approach between the two and, shortly thereafter they parted company and the community department took over full responsibility for the project. At this point my lead contact became Jane Hytch, head of the community department. My planned methodology at this stage, had three aspects:

- to observe the rehearsals,
- to administer a questionnaire
- to identify a small representative group of participants to shadow throughout the life of the project.

The publicity for In Search of Cofa's Tree subtitled the piece 'a play for Coventry' and declared that it was 'created by the Belgrade Theatre in partnership with local people'. It had been planned that the small group would keep diaries recording their experiences and reacting to the organisational and 'management style' of the project leaders since this seemed the best way to track both the use of dramatic form to symbolise the experience of the participants and the nature of the power relationship between participants and the professional theatre workers.

Unfortunately another research group - Open Theatre - was already involved with In Search of Cofa's Tree and their aims co-incided with those of this study so closely that it would not have been useful to pursue them independently. Open Theatre chose this play as one of their studies and conducted a series of

interviews with participants and theatre workers. They also selected some participants to keep regular diaries of their experience. Had the planned methodology for this study continued there would have been unwarranted and counter-productive intrusion into the working of the project.<sup>28</sup> It was therefore negotiated with Open Theatre to have access to the raw data from their questionnaire and the participant diaries. This would neither compromise this research nor interfere too much with the project itself. However, a number of factors conspired to prevent any consistent involvement with In Search of Cofa's Tree<sup>29</sup> and, although there has since been access to the diaries and director's notes, the only further contact with the production was attendance at a performance.

The work of the Belgrade's Community Department remained of real interest, however, and a subsequent approach was made in the spring of 1992 when they were planning the second major community play, Diamonds in the Dust. The research needs were discussed with the head of the department and there was a delay whilst the effect of appearance of a researcher on the project was discussed by the Community Play Steering Group and by the Workshop Leader. There were some real concerns about the last survey which had to be addressed before the agreement of the group was obtained. In addition, this

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<sup>28</sup> I was faced with a significant problem. Having chosen the Belgrade project because it offered the only opportunity I could find from a national check to observe a modified Colway Model play I felt that I could not simply find another community play to study and I therefore discussed the problem with Jane Hytch and with Liz Catis of Open Theatre.

<sup>29</sup> This research was conducted on a part-time basis and, at this stage, the balance between full-time work and the research project was impossible to maintain.

group of participants consisted of a reasonably large proportion of people with special needs whose reaction to a research presence needed to be anticipated.<sup>30</sup>

It became apparent that the eighteen-month experience of being part of the Open Theatre survey during the life of In Search of Cofa's Tree had had a considerable impact on the whole production group, both participants and theatre workers. A kind of reverse Hawthorn effect had appeared, particularly in relation to the compiling of the participant diaries, and all parties were concerned at being observed for a second time. On the one hand, Open Theatre's approach had been seen by some vocal participants as being selective and divisive, on the other hand, some of those who had been chosen had found the task counterproductive. Some had begun to resent their obligation to record their thoughts, others felt that their observations were too similar after each session to be of any merit. Burgess (1981) indicates a number of reasons for difficulties with this research method. It may be that the Open Theatre research had confused the participants by not being clear about its reasons for wanting diaries. It is also possible that the very length of the preparation period for a community play makes participant diaries an unsuitable method of information-gathering since, according to Burgess there is a marked decline in enthusiasm for diary-keeping after one month. Accordingly, the methodology of this study was revised for the second

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<sup>30</sup> Nearly 20 % of the participants had become involved through Fountain Theatre which had been set up following In Search of Cofa's Tree specifically to support people with special needs who wished to make theatre.

approach. It seemed that a very open style of information-gathering was needed and, since diaries had been effectively ruled out, a less onerous means of eliciting participants' views was required.

The new methodology centred around becoming accepted as part of the whole enterprise and had four aspects.

1. To become integrated into the project in order not to threaten the process by the very act of researching it.
2. To administer a two-part questionnaire in order to gather some general information designed to give a picture of the participants and their background.
3. To use the results of the questionnaire to identify a small group of individuals who would be suitable subjects for one-to-one interviews.
4. To conduct three interviews with a sample of participants:
  - (a) during the devising process
  - (b) during the production fortnight
  - (c) one month after the show had finished.

This strategy, combined with personal notes and an attempt at an 'objective' view of the process and product was designed to give insight into what remained the key questions - the use of dramatic form to symbolise participants' experiences and views and the ownership of the creative process.

In order to counteract the effects of the previous study of In Search of Cofa's Tree by promoting a more open approach it was important to de-mystify the research process by regular attendance at devising sessions and rehearsals. It was therefore decided:

- (i) to make notes in as public a way as I could
- (ii) actively to encourage the participants to look at the notes
- (iii) to engage in discussion about the project with as many people as possible at rehearsals.

The questionnaire was pursued but it was decided to administer it during breaks in rehearsals rather than send it out through the post. This method, it was felt:

- (I) would produce the largest number of respondents
- (ii) would give the opportunity to explain the study
- (iii) would obtain responses from those participants who had carers/interpreters.

### **The 1992 Belgrade community play**

Diamonds in the Dust, thus became the subject of the detailed case study. It was created by a Steering Group which came together after In Search of Cofa's Tree to take stock and to consider an interim evaluation from Open Theatre. The group produced an agreed list of aims and objectives <sup>31</sup> and invited Janice Dunn from the Belgrade's Community Department to lead the devising and,

ultimately to direct the play. The status of this group, its relationship to the Belgrade Theatre and the decisions it took all hold the key to the subtle but fundamental differences between this project and other community plays. Where the publicity for In Search of Cofa's Tree indicated that the play was 'created by the Belgrade Theatre in partnership with local people'; Diamonds in the Dust was described as being organised by 'local people working in partnership with the Belgrade Theatre.'

The Colway model begins with theatre professionals and seeks to involve as many members of the community as possible, the 1992 Coventry Community Play aimed to 'utilise the skills and knowledge of professional people where necessary and to ensure we learn as much as possible' (See Appendix 18). Woodruff questions whether the processes and objectives of creativity have really been changed by community plays and there is an echo of this question in another of the 1992 Coventry project's aims. Woodruff raises a query about the democracy of community projects:

...who is involved, what sort of theatre is created, how are decisions made, who is it for, how does it relate to the real world ...  
(Woodruff 1989: 370).

This is paralleled by Coventry 1992's fifth aim:

5. To explore in more depth the process of writing and creating the play. To start with nothing and create something. To truly represent the views and ideas of people as well as creating a play that is dramatic and exciting. <sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> See Appendix 18.

<sup>32</sup> See Appendix 18.

This play appeared to challenge some of the orthodoxies of the Colway model and seemed to represent a real departure. Its structure and working pattern have led to the existence of the Belgrade Model and it became clear that its organising group had attempted to meet some of their own as well as the more general criticisms of the Colway Model. The Steering Group took a number of important decisions which, this study argues, were important facets of the progress represented by the Belgrade Model.

1. It decided not to employ a writer but to use a devising process which would be led by the play's director, Janice Dunn.<sup>33</sup>
2. Working within the aims of the Belgrade's Community Department, the project sprang from the community arts tradition, but was mediated through:
  - (a) the experience of the first major community play
  - b) its building-based nature.
3. It set out to use collaboration, wanting to involve members of the community in every aspect, and at all stages of the production.
4. The content was determinedly modern and issue-based rather than historical and, therefore, the resulting play had no use for a medieval fair at the beginning.

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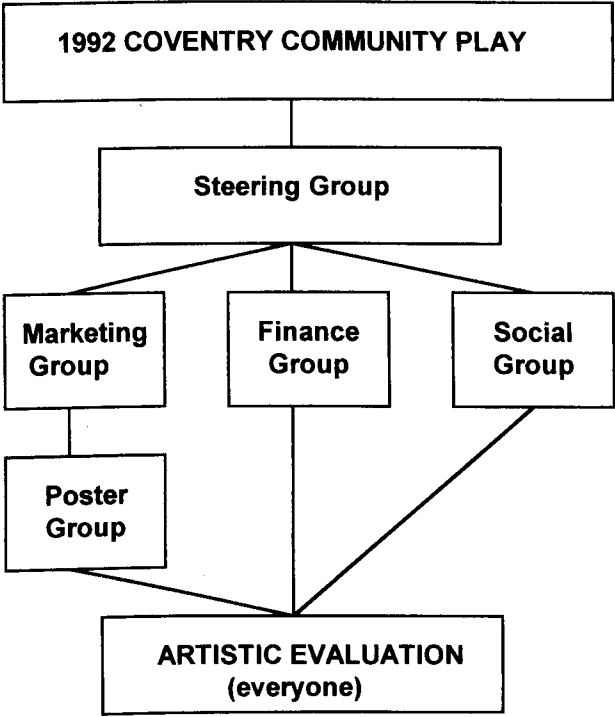
<sup>33</sup> Dunn had been one of the three workshop leaders and co-directors of *In Search of Cofa's Tree*, taking responsibility for the Coundon and Willenhall groups. This was the first time she had been wholly responsible for a community play and her comparative inexperience may have been mitigated by the fact that she was not a Colway model disciple. The 'separateness' of the Belgrade team from the Colway Theatre Trust has been referred to earlier.

5. The developmental workshops which made up the devising process were the strong focus of the project as a whole and, it could be argued, were the most successful aspect of the enterprise.<sup>34</sup>

These decisions were summarised by the director/deviser as follows:

We ... knew that we wanted it to be different, not to follow any previous pattern, and to be able to tap into its participants' creativity.<sup>35</sup>

The decisions were also mirrored in the organisational structure of the whole project:



The project team saw the community play as a federation of working groups under the umbrella of the Steering Group as the diagram indicates. The

<sup>34</sup> Reservations about the artistic standards of the finished product have been expressed particularly in respect of the structural cohesion which could have been provided by the employment of a writer.

<sup>35</sup> Janice Dunn, Director, in the programme for *Diamonds in the Dust* (1992).



differences between this project and all other community plays including In Search of Cofa's Tree, argue strongly that Diamonds in the Dust, the first Belgrade Model community play, can be seen as moving away from community theatre and towards communal theatre. The sense of re-definition through collaborative performance was expressed in the show's programme by Bob Hamblin:

Everyone in Coventry should be proud of the creativity and spirit that lies at the heart of our community. It says a great deal for the kind of City we could become.<sup>36</sup>

The critical path for Diamonds in the Dust was broadly similar to other community play projects but had been a little condensed by the team's recent experience with In Search of Cofa's Tree. Although planning and fund-raising began in 1991 the project did not assume a public face until early 1992. Twice-weekly evening workshops began in March and continued until July. These were supplemented by a series of Saturday sessions on different aspects of the production - dance; men's dance, music making. Between March and May the workshops changed in nature. They began as relatively free improvisation sessions - drama workshops designed to identify the major areas of concern for the participants - and gradually became devising sessions where ideas which were plainly contributing to the eventual play were explored and developed. This collaborative feel was commented on by Janice Dunn in the programme when she wrote: 'What you see are our ideas, what you hear, our words'.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Robert Hamblin, Director, Belgrade Theatre in the programme for Diamonds in the Dust (1992.)

<sup>37</sup> Janice Dunn, Director, in the programme for Diamonds in the Dust (1992).

A scenario was constructed by the director and during a summer recess the group were cast. They returned in early September and began to rehearse what by then had become a play which was performed between November 6th and 14th 1992.

### **Methodology: ethnography versus positivism**

I attended a number of the workshops and rehearsals as well as sitting in on steering group, marketing group and finance group meetings. I also had a series of informal discussions with the staff team. I attempted, as far as I was able, to maintain an open approach to the information-gathering. I always arrived early for devising sessions and rehearsals to talk to the participants and ensured that I set up my table away from the director and choreographer so as not to be located publicly with the professional team. I took notes during the sessions and frequently left my table to observe the proceedings from another position and to allow anyone who wished to come over and see what I had been doing. I was quite surprised by the fact that this actually happened on a number of occasions. Some of the members of Fountain Theatre were remarkably uninhibited about their curiosity and gave the lead to other members of the group. I also made a point of staying on for a while after the sessions for informal conversations with the participants. Each session had a break for coffee which was organised by the participants with the coffee sold as part of the overall fund-raising effort. This was a very useful time for

picking up immediate responses to the activity from everyone involved in the project. It was also the best time for the administration of the questionnaire.

The object of undertaking any data collection in a study of this kind cannot be to find evidence for conclusive statements or 'proofs'. The sample involved is too small to stand scrutiny of its statistical reliability and validity. From an empirical standpoint the information gathered must therefore be viewed largely as contributing qualitatively not quantitatively to the study. The wider point here, in contradiction of the erstwhile orthodoxy of social science, is the acceptance of the subjective. This study approaches the task of information gathering from an ethnographic position. It is based in the belief that all knowledge is selective and makes little clear, positivist, difference between facts and values. Apart from some small aspects of the 'hard' data collection from questionnaires the intention is to employ the interpretative tradition and use a form of participant observation.<sup>38</sup>

The main aim has therefore been to find illustrative material of a personal nature - reminiscence, opinion, conjecture and supposition from the people who are closely involved in the creation of a piece of communal theatre, in order to be able to flesh out ideas and theories from the literature with commentaries on actual experience. At best, then, the approach may be considered as quasi-empirical. Its tools were a limited questionnaire in two

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<sup>38</sup> As outlined in Burgess (1981).

parts <sup>39</sup> and a series of one-to-one structured interviews with a selected group.

The questionnaire was designed in two sections which were printed on both sides of a single sheet. The first side was divided into two sections. Section A was designed to elicit some personal information about the participants: their sex, age (in 10-year bands) and their occupation. Section B asked for information specific to the respondent's involvement with, and experience of theatre in general and the community play in particular. The second side asked four general questions which were designed (a) to find out more about the individual's background and motivation, (b) to obtain opinion about the nature of the experience and (c) to ask for a prediction about the nature of the final performance. Finally, respondents were asked to indicate whether they would object to further contact. It can therefore be seen that the main aims of the questionnaire were:

- (a) to obtain a statistical <sup>40</sup> picture of the participants
- (b) to get a clearer, individual understanding of the participants' perceptions of community plays
- (c) to get participants to describe their experiences in their own words
- (d) to invite predictions about the final performance and its reception.

The second side of the questionnaire was also intended to help in the

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<sup>39</sup> See Appendix 17.

<sup>40</sup> Despite the use of the word 'statistical' it is clearly recognised that there can be no empirical validity to information obtained from a sample of this size.

identification of a suitable group who would be the subjects of the one-to-one interviews.

In order to identify potential interviewees, I planned to create a sub-set of respondents whose responses to the second side of the questionnaire showed them to be willing, responsive and able to express their views with some clarity. This was the most important selection criterion:

1. Willing, responsive and articulate.

This done I intended to look for adequate representation of some or all of the following in order to produce a small group of between 5 and 10 who would become the interview group:

2. Age - the youngest participants were under 10 and the oldest over 60

3. Gender - although seeking adequate representation <sup>41</sup> I decided that I would have to work with those who were willing to work with me. It seemed unlikely that I would get a 100% response because there were a significant number of people who were thought to have dropped out and there was quite a high proportion of participants who had special needs and who would be entirely dependent on their carers to fill in the questionnaire on their behalf. I therefore decided to try and replicate the gender balance of the respondent group rather than the group as a whole.

4. Membership of the Steering Group - it was important to ensure that the voices I heard did not only represent the views of the Steering Group

especially since I was able to obtain that group's views by attendance at their meetings.

5. Special Needs - approximately 30% of the participants joined the project via Fountain Theatre and had special needs. It seemed appropriate to represent this in the interview sample.

The sample thus produced would then be approached and asked if they would be willing to be interviewed three times for about 20 minutes. First, during the devising/rehearsal period; second during the production week and third, approximately one month after the show. I wanted to try and establish whether there would be any significant shifts in participant opinion over the five or six month period in two areas which I called democracy and ownership. I decided that this would be best achieved by asking the same, or very similar, questions at each interview <sup>42</sup> and, for the first interview I planned to frame these key questions by trying to establish the individual's view of community and to conclude by asking for a prediction about the performance.

## **Planned interview structure**

### Opening remarks:

I planned to begin each interview by asking how the play was going from the individual's point of view. This was in order to gain the participant's

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<sup>41</sup> If the questionnaire revealed, for example, that the gender balance of the participants was 75/25 female to male then I would expect my small group of interviewees to be similarly balanced.

<sup>42</sup> See Appendix 17 for the exact wording of the questions.

confidence, to introduce the subject and to encourage the conversation to flow before moving on to the main function of the interview. I would be able here to remark upon things I had observed at devising/rehearsal sessions.

### Introduction - community:

This question was designed to elicit the participant's views on the constitution of the community play group and, having established that the community was not a simple geographical one, pave the way for discussion in the two key areas.

### Key area 1 - democracy

The question here was designed to investigate the participant's view of what Woodruff has called 'the processes and objects of creativity' in relation to the community play project. I wanted to find out what the participant's view of the decision-making process was. In short, was the federal structure working?

### Key area 2 - ownership

Here I planned to investigate how far the individual felt their own views, experiences and ideas were being incorporated in and reflected by the play itself. Whose play was it going to be ?

### Conclusion - prediction

This area was intended to open up discussion about artistic quality. One of the Belgrade Community Department's overall aims is 'to ensure that community theatre in Coventry is of the highest possible standard' and the structure of the project aimed to involve all participants in artistic evaluation.

185 questionnaires were prepared some of which were administered during devising sessions. The remainder were posted to those people who were on the project's books as having expressed an interest in the community play and who had completed a form registering that interest. 49 questionnaires were returned, of which 4 were from people who had withdrawn from the project and one contained information relating to a family of three. The usable sample was thus 47 individuals which represented a response rate of 25.4%. However, the number of people who are credited in the programme with involvement in the final play is 90 and set against this the response rate becomes 52.2%.

I then removed from the sample:

- children under 10 because of the conceptual level of the planned interviews
- anyone who had indicated unwillingness to be contacted further
- individuals who were not involved in the devising process (costume-makers etc.)
- those questionnaires which showed limited or nil response to the optional second page.

I analysed the remaining responses, which numbered 26, as outlined above, from the point of view of: (i) age, (ii) gender, (iii) steering group membership, (iv) special needs, and, taking into account the quality of information provided on the second side of the questionnaire, from the point of view of apparent



willingness, responsiveness and articulateness. I produced a list of 12 respondents who might be included in the interview group and analysed their questionnaires to reduce the number to between 6 and 8. The following table shows that analysis:

Table of Respondents

Qu	1	2	6	9	10	11	17	22	24	31	35	41
Age	5	1	6	6	6	3	1	2	2	2	4	5
M/F	F	F	F	F	M	M	F	M	M	F	F	M
SG	x	x	x	x	✓	x	x	✓	x	✓	✓	✓
Will	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓
R/A	1	1	1	2	3	4	3	2	1	4	4	4
Res	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12

KEY

- Qu Questionnaire number
  - Age Age group: 1 = under 20, 2 = 20-30, 3 = 30-40, 4 = 40-50, 5 = 50-60, 6 = over 60
  - M/F Male/Female
  - SG Member of Steering Group
  - Will Willingness to be interviewed.  
Based on response to the final question on page 2.
  - R/A Responsiveness/Articulateness. Based on subjective assessment of responses to Questions 1-4 on page 2. 1 = weak, 4 = strong.
  - Res Respondent number.
- (For further detail relating to the management of the questionnaire see Appendix 20.)

Although I had planned that there should be adequate representation of participants with special needs in the interview group, it became obvious that there was no reliable way of identifying such a group. The questionnaire did not ask for evidence of such needs. Indeed, possibly the only way it could have done so was by checking membership of Fountain Theatre but this would not have produced a reliable list for two reasons:

- (i) there were some participants with special needs who were not Fountain Theatre members
- (ii) some Fountain Theatre members either
  - (a) do not have special needs or
  - (b) are carers.

I still wished to obtain the perspective of a participant with special needs and, having discussed this with the project team, on their advice I approached one individual via his carer. The approach was not successful. The individual, who appears in the table as Respondent No. 9, had not, at that stage, returned a questionnaire, could only communicate with me by using his carer as an interpreter and was ultimately unwilling to be interviewed regularly.<sup>43</sup> On the basis of this information I decided not to try and represent statistically this subset of the sample in the interview group.

It seemed to me that I had taken every precaution against being so removed from the project as to be viewed by the participants as a mere observer with a notebook but the conduct of the interviews and the drop-out rate from the interview group led me to suspect that I had not been as integrated as I had at first thought and I reflected further on my influence on the process as a whole. It seems to me now that although I felt that I was working largely unnoticed by the participants this was plainly not true, and my 'white coat' remained

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<sup>43</sup> When he had completed the questionnaire he indicated that he was uncertain about further contact and this, combined with the logistical difficulties of only being able to meet him during the day when his carer was on duty, meant that I felt that it would have been unwise to push the matter and try and include him in the interview group.

visible to the group. My presence also issued reminders of the previous play and its intensive, high-profile monitoring.

## Observations

All of these people have come together to make a play for themselves and their community. However what they have in common is not just geographical, but a commitment to this project, a willingness to try something new, a desire to change and the capability to support each other. *The Belgrade Theatre provided the framework*, and the people did the rest.

Janice Dunn <sup>44</sup>

The questionnaire provided valuable information about exactly who all of these people were and offers some insight into their collective definition of 'community'. The results of the questionnaire are analysed below <sup>45</sup> and, when information from the play programme is added in, they show that the usable sample matches, almost exactly, the gender balance of the final cast.<sup>46</sup>

There were more women in the project group (57%) and the group was largely under 40 (53.2%) although the spread of ages is wide with 21.3% of the group being over 50. The strong connections between the Director and the Belgrade Youth Theatre may have weighted the age balance towards younger people. In terms of theatre experience, 60% of the group were new to community plays and only 14.9% describe themselves as regular theatregoers. The project seems to have appealed to a wide range of people who are not typically the

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<sup>44</sup> Director of *Diamonds in the Dust* (1992), in the programme. My emphasis.

<sup>45</sup> See also Appendix 19.

kind of people who watch performances but who have come together to make their own theatre within the guidelines of the project's aims.

The Belgrade Model of community playmaking operates within the theatre's framework of community responsiveness which seeks to give the people of Coventry a stake in its regional repertory theatre. The aims of the community department which make specific reference to working with ethnic minorities, developing equal opportunities and providing opportunities for those with special needs are clearly promoting access to cultural goods in ways which augur well for higher levels of aesthetic justice. These general aims are perceived to have been successful by the participants as the following comments from the interviews demonstrate:

Who was able to be in it? From all walks of life, old, young, black, white, disabled. That's how I visualised it and that's how it was.

Participant 5

From the moment I joined the project I knew that everyone would be welcomed no matter what race, no matter what gender. Participant 11

It isn't just upper class, not just lower class, not just black ... it is genuinely open to all walks of life.

Participant 10

The specific aims of the 1992 community play represent further support for the overall view of the Belgrade Model as aesthetically just theatre practice. These aims, too, are seen by the participants to have been carried into an

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<sup>46</sup> The final cast list contains 90 names. 51 women and 39 men - a gender balance of 56.6% women to 43.3% men. When rounded (F 57; M 43) these figures match exactly the rounded figures from the usable sample of the questionnaires. (Female 57.4% {57}; male 42.6%{43})

empowering, participatory practice as this set of comments demonstrates:

The publicity for the play says that it's a play which is created by the people of Coventry - it's ours. Definitely it's ours.

Participant 4

The director looks at the idea and then gives suggestions for it being developed in a more theatrical term. So while the original idea would come from the players it would be adjusted, if necessary, by the director but the basic idea for the scene would be the players' concerned.

Participant 12

Obviously it's led ... but having said that, we are going to be putting this on stage in a professional theatre and you have got to have some expertise put in to develop our work.

Participant 10

However, the pressures of presenting the piece publicly occasionally dented the egalitarian intentions as the following participants indicated:

I think there were times when the Belgrade team themselves rather tended to take over and overturn decisions that we had arrived at at meetings.

Participant 11

I don't think the interference, well I say interference - slight taking over - appeared until we got actually nearer to deciding how the play was running. What was going to be in and what was going to be left out - things like that. Prior to that it was very democratic I thought.

Participant 6

Other participants reveal concerns about the point at which their creativity came into play. In terms of comparisons between the Belgrade and Colway models, this raises the possibility that, unless the participants are involved with the process right from the start, there may be little difference, from their point of view, between devising and working on a text.

I feel they had an outline of what they wanted originally ... they already had this idea of “community” in the devising part. I mean the first thing we did when we came in was about community and what part you played in the community so I felt that decision was out of our hands. Participant 10

We were divided into groups and a very general idea would be given to us about what the scene would contain and then we would improvise it. Probably the structure was already in mind.  
Participant 6

... the suggestion about one of the young ones throwing a ball and smashing a window ... was suggested to us by the director ... but the actual development of the scene is what we did when we were in the group.  
Participant 12

These comments illustrate a set of reservations which are markedly similar to many of the objections raised against the Colway Model. Although Diamonds in the Dust had no commissioned writer, it seems clear that not only did the participants feel that it was being “written” during the devising process but also that they had always been working within a framework which came from the core professional team.

### **Diamonds in the Dust: the play in performance**

The first impression of the play is of the presentation of multiple texts, or rather, of a narrative which is advanced in three ways at once. The main character, Daniel, is played by a young Asian who has limited speech and mobility and, whilst he is the main focus of the opening scenes, his irrepressible personality is simultaneously physicalized by a very athletic young cast member *who is also* Daniel. This dramaturgical device carries a number of messages about the way we perceive others, about notions of disability and about the frustrations of a lively intelligence caught inside a

partly-functioning body. The third strand of the narrative is presented by the signer <sup>47</sup> who has a function within the play rather than being a side-stage presence. The two people acting 'Daniel' talk to each other *across* the action on stage and the signing is not only fully integrated into the action but the signer moves with it amongst the performers thus creating a three-way narrative for the main character. The naturalistic scenes are intercut with music and dance sequences which are well choreographed and powerful. <sup>48</sup>

There are two main issues in the play which are redolent of its specificity to Coventry in 1992. During that summer there was a concern about relationships between travelling people and local residents. This was, for a short time, a national issue but was particularly important for Coventry people and it became an emblem for the play because it sought to investigate what 'community' meant for the group of people involved in its creation. The second issue was, in effect, seeded into this play by the outcome of the previous project (*In Search of Cofa's Tree: Coventry 1990*) and that is the integration of people with disabilities into the project group. As a result the play leads us through a series of sequences which discuss perceptions of disability (as personified by Daniel) and presents a view of a more or less functioning community which is challenging disability stereotyping. Into this set of circumstances come a group of travellers who are presented as free spirits who

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<sup>47</sup> All performances were sign-interpreted using British Sign Language.

<sup>48</sup> Both types of work (drama and dance) were developed in the same way, by devising and negotiation, but there were marked differences in their respective performance qualities. The dance sequences gave the impression of being more polished and professional.

are childlike in their apparent freedom from many of the responsibilities of social organisation. Some of the problems faced by the more conventional families, redundancy for example, have no parallel or place in the lives of the travellers. The enactment of these two main issues presents a picture of a wide range humanity. It is inclusive; it goes way beyond Willis' 3M society and it tries genuinely to be representative. From the point of view of an observer there is a real parallel between the world picture presented on stage and that represented in the auditorium. The impression is of an event which is both representative and inclusive of its audience/community.

In Act 2 some dramaturgical and image problems become apparent. After the inevitable confrontation between travellers and local residents, which is centred around blame for vandalism, the simplistic image of the travellers becomes problematic. This is exacerbated by the 'solutions' which the play presents. These are based around the idea that we are all the same under the skin. There is, for example, a scene where the traveller family is revealed to have disabled members and there is a male dance sequence which purports to symbolise the integration (or, perhaps, simply the mixing together) of the local residents and the travellers. The denouement of the play shows the travellers moving on after having imparted some of their philosophy to Daniel and the other local residents. One traveller says 'We make the decisions - we've got no-one to answer to' and what is understood by this is that this empowering view can be taken up by those with more conventional lifestyles. Judge not lest ye



be judged; take responsibility for your own existence; make decisions; effect change; take control of your own life. Unfortunately, at this point, one is forced to conclude that the overview offered by the play is too simplistic as the loose ends of the plot are neatly tied up in the final scenes. A troubled father/daughter relationship appears to be resolved as the father says: 'Lisa, I think we need to talk ...' and Daniel's mother, somewhat heavy-handedly, reinforces the play's central metaphor of attitudes to the travellers as a symbol of prejudice about disability by saying: 'People don't understand the travellers - just like they don't understand you, do they Daniel?'

These examples of unsophisticated 'soap-opera' dialogue and inadequate plotting lend weight to Ann Jellicoe's criticism that a writer is needed and they point up the marked difference between the drama and the dance elements in the play. These differences are instructive in the context of communal theatre making since they have been produced by as near an identical process as is possible.<sup>49</sup>

The general empowerment issues at stake in the narrative and style of the play, and therefore represented by the performance itself, concern:

- the self actualising possibility of taking social action to combat stereotypical labelling of a broad range of social groups who are

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<sup>49</sup> Perhaps this can be explained by the possibility that people feel that, almost regardless of their lack of professional training, they have some ability/potential in the construction of scenes/dialogue whereas few profess to any real knowledge and understanding of the dance and so rely more on the lead given by the choreographer.

symbolised by the images of the travellers and the disabled in the play

- understanding and working with the difficulties associated with a mixed ability cast - promoting inclusivity.

The specifically theatrical empowerments concern:

- learning to use, and stage, multiple readings of a single character
- physicalising the sub-text
- experimenting with advancement of plot through non-naturalistic means, for example, dance sequences
- using theatre, *per se*, to understand local issues, for example, the real travellers who arrived in Coventry in the summer of 1992.

There may always be a point at which improvised work will be handed over to a director and this may be done willingly, and with the agreement of the participants, but there were perceived to be concerns on the part of the professional core team about the public presentation of the piece. These concerns inevitably had an impact on the participants' perceived level of empowerment. Conceivably (although this is speculation) the arts workers may have been concerned about the reflection on their professional standing of these kind of choices. With respect to the title for the piece there are likely to have been marketing implications for the Belgrade. This is illustrated by the debate over the choice of title. There was, as Participant 10 said, 'a bit of a

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shemozzle about the title' which centred on the difference between the words 'dark' and 'dust'. Many participants felt that the title 'Diamonds in the Dust' gave the wrong message about them as people, about their situation and about the perceived industrial grime of Coventry whereas 'Diamonds in the Dark' seemed to them to be redolent of community opportunity:

It upset a lot of people ... the sort of opinions they were expressing were "well why did we bother to have a meeting? I mean, we had a meeting, we thrashed it out, we argued about it, we talked about it, we came to a decision and the next week it was announced at rehearsals that the title was this."

Participant 12

They didn't like 'dust' ... they had an overwhelming vote for 'dark' and then it was announced that it was going to be 'Diamonds in the Dust'.

Participant 10

At the time I said that I liked the title but I did think it was rather high-handed 'the way they overturned the decision made by the committee that discussed it.

Participant 5

This debate unified and focused attention on all of the key areas of empowerment in the project as a whole. For the professional workers the handling of it probably represents a heavy blow to the democratic process by making explicit, both to them and to the participants, the existence of a hierarchy which gave more power to them. There are strong resonances with the view of participant 6 that they had always been working within a pre-determined structure. The participants who expressed concern about the choice of title did so in ways which indicated that they felt they had lost a previously perceived power to influence the whole direction of the project and,

these three factors; democracy, hierarchy and influence over direction, compromised the paid workers who, by failing to exercise their enabling skills effectively moved the whole project away from collaboration and back towards participation.

The difficulties over the choice of title also hint at the idea of empowerment for the paid workers. This is problematic and raises issues which have not been investigated in this study which has focused on understanding and interpreting the experience of the participants. Many arts workers would see themselves as enabling or facilitating the empowerment of others rather than as subjects of empowerment themselves. They undertake their task by promoting, for example, democratic approaches and collective decisions-making whilst not wishing to relinquish the opportunity to use and develop their particular skills, both in project development leading to play production and in the management of the people involved in the project. The indications from this study are that these approaches are more likely to be found in Belgrade model plays than in Colway model plays and it seems reasonable to assume that empowerment for paid workers, perhaps expressed in similar overall terms to that of unpaid workers, would probably have a significant focus outside the immediate context of the project, i.e. in the hierarchies of producing and funding organisations.

## Summary

In the terms of this study the results of the interviews reveal the scope and strength of the participation but they militate against the description of the project as communal theatre since, in terms of ownership, the participants who were interviewed seemed to feel that:

- they were working with a structure which was not wholly theirs
- within that structure they were, at worst, merely being *allowed* to develop their own ideas
- the pressure of public performance had adverse effects on an otherwise democratic process.

The comments of the participants seem to support the contention of this study that the Belgrade Model is a significant departure from the Colway model which makes some progress for its participants towards the goal of aesthetic justice. The fieldwork demonstrates that the picture of community play animation as posited earlier in this chapter in the table of differences between the Colway and Belgrade models leaves something to be desired. The emphasis in the table on the categories as intentions, rather than as absolute opposites, needs to be more heavily underlined since the reality of the Belgrade model is flawed by its partial, if unplanned and possibly unwitting, regression into participatory rather than collaborative work. Whilst it is probably true to say that the use of a devised, process-focused, issue-based approach is a necessary pre-requisite to a collaborative project, it is not a guarantee of a successful outcome in terms of communal theatre. The practice

is substantially more complicated than the theory and the Belgrade team recognised this in their clear understanding that they were creating new rules for progress within the model. This progress, however, reveals that simply removing the writer does not remove the real barrier between people and their creativity. Dunn's comment in the programme for Diamonds in the Dust that 'the Belgrade Theatre provided the framework' for the project proved to be completely accurate. Whilst this project was undoubtedly a success since it clearly gave a general sense of ownership to those involved, if these participants are listened to there is much more to be done to create a community play methodology which promotes empowerment and ownership in every aspect of the project. The key would seem to be with the exact nature of the full collaboration which may begin with participant involvement in the construction of the framework for the project in order to lead towards communal theatre.

## Conclusions:

# Pictures of the World

There's a sense that people couldn't have done it without the professionals - so they understand that role, but I'm not sure whether that merges into the ownership issue ... which is almost the same as saying 'we don't own this project'.

Richard Hayhow <sup>1</sup>

Community plays have been hailed as democratic art forms which offer the promise of popular control of art-making. This study has argued that Colway Model and, to a certain extent, Belgrade Model community plays in their current stage of development, whilst offering new approaches towards aesthetic justice, stop short of being able to promote the aesthetically materialist idea of *communal* theatre. The study presents the view that it is the nature of the shared experience <sup>2</sup> between the paid and unpaid

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Jones 1995 (b).

<sup>2</sup> See the comments of Brian Macdonald, Bridlington Town participant, quoted in Jones 1995 (b).

participants which needs the greatest scrutiny since it tests what Kershaw describes as the 'dialectical efficacy' of the community play to counteract bourgeois control of cultural production.

### **The arts entitlement**

This study has suggested that Article 27 of the Declaration of Human Rights is an emblem of a kind of arts entitlement which has two components - participation in and enjoyment of the arts. The study offers a revision of these ideas by re-interpreting what these components mean. *Enjoyment* of the existing and established arts is seen to be valuable in its own right but gradualist in the terms of this study. *Participation* is seen to be to do with the democratisation of culture and as such needs to be sharpened into the more aesthetically materialist *collaboration* if it is to contribute to the creation of an aesthetically just society.

Concentrating on influences on and practices in British theatre this century, the study has examined the potential of community theatre to promote the components of the arts entitlement. Specifically, the focus has been on the community play and an investigation of its contribution to what Boal has called a 'poetics of liberation.' Beardsley's concept of aesthetic justice was used to give an insight into the practical realisation of the arts entitlement and, together with the statistics of Willis and others, this identified a picture of British society as aesthetically unjust. From this position, the study focused on theatre in the community to examine some ways in which aesthetic injustice might be counteracted. In order to establish the social and theatrical



background to community theatre in general and the community play in particular, the study then identified some of the influences on theatre for empowerment and the history and development of outreach and education work in the professional arts in the last 25 years.

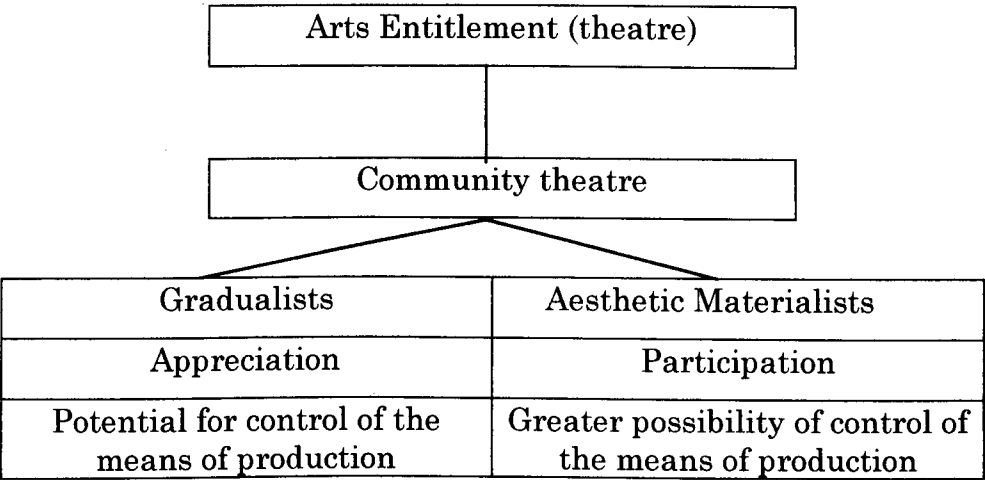
Community theatre is seen by the study to be an area of cultural participation which is a key component of a broad attempt to nurture aesthetic justice. The community play, with its potential to involve significant numbers of ordinary people, was investigated in detail by means of a case study of the 1992 Belgrade theatre community play. Community plays were evaluated as part of a mainstream theatrical development which began with Brecht and was developed by Boal: they are seen as an aspect of the utilitarian use of theatre for empowerment.<sup>3</sup>

There have been two distinct approaches to community playmaking which became apparent as a number of practitioners modified Ann Jellicoe's original Colway Theatre Trust model. These are identified in the history of community arts and categorised as gradualism and aesthetic materialism. The differences in community play methodology are seen to be associated with the key issues of ethos, scale and control of the process. The work which is assessed by the study as having the greatest potential for promoting a culturally democratic arts entitlement comes from a community arts

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<sup>3</sup> It is interesting in this context to note that Boal has further developed his practice to propose a new form: Legislative Theatre. This is designed to take enactment into the heart of the legislature and thus attempts to complete the circle of theatre as social action.

background while most community plays are seen to be aspects of the democratisation of culture. This can be represented by the following diagram:



**Participatory theatre in the 1990s**

Explicit objections to aspects of Colway Model community play methodology have been articulated both through a developing practice and in the literature. The study argues that this can be seen, in the mainstream, in the work of the Belgrade theatre and, in community arts, in the work of Telford Community Arts. The TCA approach is radically different from the Colway Model for two reasons. First, the practice began from a different premise,<sup>4</sup> that of empowering the working class specifically and, second, TCA work remained rooted within one working class community. In contrast, the mainstream developing practice post-1990 was largely inspired by the Belgrade example. It sought to operate within an established community play movement and was necessarily nomadic with key workers moving around the country as each new community play project was set up.

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 5.

Open Theatre’s investigative report identified gradualism within the aims of four out of five of the plays studied <sup>5</sup> but it is possible to see within recent participatory theatre activity a number of attempts to create both a more equal and a more aesthetically just society. The differences are those of methodology and social context, the commonalities are those of empowering intention.

The balance of emphasis in participatory theatre during the 1990s can be represented in the terms of this study by the following table in which it is possible to codify both Kelly’s idea of ‘direct participation in living culture’ and Reynolds’ concern to see ‘democracy triumph over autocracy’.

Participatory Theatre in the 1990s	
Gradualism	Aesthetic materialism
Mainstream	Radical
Mainly naturalistic	Mainly non-naturalistic
An aspect of the arts in the community	Origins in community arts
Celebration	Provocation
Democratising culture	Culturally democratic
Affirmative	Oppositional
Community theatre	Communal theatre

<sup>5</sup> The fifth play (Stony Stratford 1992) was animated by Living Archive of Milton Keynes and comes directly from the documentary theatre tradition. This form was best developed in mainstream theatre by the work of Peter Cheeseman at the New Victoria Theatre, Stoke on Trent and exists in the community play movement in the work of Remould Theatre Company from Hull.

The picture of community play practice is not the simple Colway/Belgrade opposition that it was at the beginning of this study. There have been rapid developments during the 1990s and there are now a range of alternative practices <sup>6</sup> which can be loosely grouped under the umbrella of community playmaking.

These are: Colway 1 (1978-1986): Ann Jellicoe <sup>7</sup>

- Belgrade Theatre Coventry (1989-1992)
- Remould Theatre (continuing)
- Avon Community Theatre Agency (continuing)
- Colway 2 (1986 onwards): Jon Oram

Colway 1 and Belgrade have been dealt with in some detail in the preceding chapter. Remould Theatre (see footnote 6) are a touring company who, in addition to other work, have made a number of community plays in the North East. Their work is professionally directed and written after detailed research by both paid and unpaid participants in the process and is located within the documentary theatre tradition. Avon Community Theatre Agency (ACTA) works exclusively in working class communities on community plays which are then professionally written and directed. These forms can be located within the table of differences in contemporary participatory theatre as follows:

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<sup>6</sup> There is, in addition, the work of Salford Open Theatre which has not been sufficiently documented to permit analysis. However, it represents an interesting addition to the range of practice since it is a determinedly participant-led organisation which, amongst other activity, makes community plays. The group retain control of the means of production by engaging their own writers, directors and workshop leaders after having decided the nature of their project.

<sup>7</sup> These dates mark only the limits of Ann Jellicoe's involvement with the Colway Theatre Trust. She continues to work in the field as a freelance, often on international projects.

Participatory Theatre in the 1990s	
Gradualism	Aesthetic materialism
Mainstream	Radical
Mainly naturalistic	Mainly non-naturalistic
An aspect of the arts in the community	Origins in community arts
Mainly celebratory	Possibly provocative
Democratising culture	Culturally democratic
Affirmative	Oppositional
Community theatre	Communal theatre
Forms of practice	
Colway 1	Telford Community Arts
Remould	
Hybrid forms	
Belgrade	
ACTA	
Colway 2	

What distinguishes these different forms of cultural participation is the relative importance placed upon the democracy of the art and the primacy of the voice of the people. The key issue is control of the means of artistic production which can only be fully realised by a devising process of theatre-making combined with a shared approach to constructing the general framework for the project as a whole. The devising principle offers the possibility of getting past people’s apparent views to their real interests by using their actual experiences and the shared approach to project management offers an answer to some of the objections raised by the

participants in Diamonds in the Dust. Analysed from this perspective the mainstream forms, Colway 1 and Remould, together with the hybrid forms, Colway 2 and Belgrade, represent various gradualist stages on the continuum from democratising culture towards cultural democracy. Only the work of Telford Community Arts can be viewed as genuinely aesthetically materialist and there are issues of scale, form and content which support this view but the central feature is clearly control of the means of production.

Most community plays avoid making judgements about real issues which affect their communities of interest (with the possible exception of the Bridlington Town Play <sup>8</sup> which debated an unpleasant series of events in the town's history). In order to be fully aesthetically just, community plays must accept the responsibility of grappling with the present and of making such judgements as are necessary. The issue of scale intervenes here. It is difficult for a large group of people to operate in their own interests. The smaller scale activity of TCA means that it is more likely that the group will come to a shared and agreed judgement and that the compromises inherent in decision-making shared amongst 250 people will be avoided. In terms of form and content, TCA activity began and remained issue-based and also largely rejected naturalism. However, now that TCA no longer functions and the Belgrade Theatre have ceased to mount large-scale community projects, the

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<sup>8</sup> Significantly, this play, although animated by Remould Theatre Company within their documentary theatre tradition, was co-written and directed by Richard Hayhow of Open Theatre who was a co-author of the Open Theatre report and a consultant on the Belgrade theatre's 1992 play Diamonds in the Dust.

future development of the community play lies ostensibly in the possibility of development within the work of ACTA and Colway 2 and with the potential for the ethos of community arts to pervade community play practice still further. In fact, the picture is more complicated since the freelance nature of theatre practitioners means that there has been a movement between the organisations listed above of a number of key individuals whose own developing practice provides the key to the nature of future communal theatre.

### **Implications of the fieldwork**

In the light of the practical compromises between participation and collaboration which the fieldwork eventually identified and of which the debate about the title of Diamonds in the Dust is a keen example, it is tempting to be persuaded that this signifies a retrenchment from the possibilities of aesthetic materialism into the apparent certainties of gradualism. This would allow the assumption, *pace* Shaw, that arts practitioners must be content with 'improving the quality of the national life' (Shaw 1987) by facilitating Kelly's secondary understandings of art. However, this comment from a participant indicates that there is a recognition which seems to confirm the potential of the aesthetic materialist approach for developing primary understandings.

I was very unconfident when we began all this 'cause I've never done anything like this before but, now its all over, I'm glad I stayed involved instead of jacking it in like I thought I would half way through. I feel better about, sort of, expressing myself like this, in plays in the future.

Participant 8.

The kind of comments, of which this is an example, indicate, at the least, that there is an avenue worth pursuing here for future approaches to community theatre practice. This leads to some final consideration of the nature of any poetics of liberation which may result from communal theatre activity. It seems reasonable to return to the categories discussed in the Introduction to the study and comment on liberations which are (a) specific to theatre, (b) self-actualising and, (c) offering potential for social action. First, the Belgrade project offers clear development of theatre-related skills and some, albeit qualified, opportunity for ownership and control of the means of artistic production. Second, it seems likely that any self-actualising benefits would derive from simple involvement in the process although the study did not attempt to quantify this. Indeed, it would be hard to know exactly how this *could* be measured. Third, and similarly difficult to measure, I suspect that arts workers would adopt a long-term view which, in keeping with Boal and later Brecht, would see the participants as alterable and liable to alter in their capacity for social action. Instances of social change directly brought about by arts activity, like that in Eramosa (Little & Sim 1992) are rare, and so the results of this aspect of liberation may only be evident within the context of the arts. This comment from one of the Belgrade participants is heavy with possibility and, indeed, there have been at least two new independent performance groups established in the wake of Diamonds in the Dust.



I didn't think we could pull it off but these are our ideas and so this is our play. We can even think about going on to other things - perhaps without the involvement of these leaders.

Participant 11.

It can only be concluded from this study that this poetics of liberation probably operates specifically in the realm of theatre and, as evidenced by participant 11 above, in connection with Kelly's idea of direct participation in living culture, with each participant thinking and acting for themselves, not delegating their artistic power and potential to others.

### **Communal theatre**

One of the implications of this study is that the idea of arts entitlement needs to be strengthened from the loose participatory notion of 'arts for all' into the more muscular aesthetic materialism of *collaboration* in art making. In the specific context of the community play, this means the development of working methods which ensure not only equality of access to, but popular control of, the cultural capital which is symbolised by community playmaking.

The study concludes that aesthetic justice is a viable concept which can exist as a practical poetics of liberation. It can be found in the new cultural form of the community play which has a number of differing incarnations and which provides a context for a generalised empowerment. It is certainly true that aesthetic justice cannot be created by legislation or policy but by an acknowledgement of the arts entitlement and by education in its broadest sense which engenders both an awareness of possibility and, as Woodruff has it, 'a desire to find creative expression for (one's) experience' (Woodruff

1989:372). In other words there has to be an individual impulse framed within a shared experience. The caveat is that the more overtly gradualist the activity is the more liable it may be to be hijacked by the middle classes. In some forms, it is therefore in danger of being used almost purely to reinforce the dominant culture.

This raises again the issue of whose culture is being supported and whose world view is represented through art. As Willis (1990) has shown there may be a significant misunderstanding of the nature of the real culture of the majority and especially that of young people. This seems to support the view that whatever the constituency of interest, versions of communal theatre which only aim for the democratisation of culture are in danger of offering a kind of toothless empowerment which, because of its focus on celebration rather than provocation, is destined for only rare success in terms of social action,<sup>11</sup> whereas versions of communal theatre which aim to be culturally democratic offer participation in an activity which can have greater long-term social effects.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the issue is one of degree. All current methodologies of community playmaking can be securely located as forms of

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<sup>11</sup> Like the Colway 2: Eramosa project referred to in chapter 5. See Little & Sim 1992.

<sup>12</sup> This goes hand in hand with the extended nature of community arts projects like Telford and is therefore out of the reach of (comparatively) short-term single focus projects like community plays. As Woodruff commented in 1993:

.. TCA workers have shown a rare (I mean rare among professional theatre artists) commitment to and identification with their community. Several have lived in the community for over twenty years, worked on arts projects for over 15 years and still live there three years after the demise of the project. They see themselves (and saw TCA) as part of the community not - to use Dario Fo's phrase - parachuting into the community.  
(Letter to David Jones 14.8.1993.)

cultural participation which are working towards the general notion of an arts entitlement <sup>13</sup> and which, therefore, are making a significant contribution to a more aesthetically just society.

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<sup>13</sup> The question remains as to how far communal theatre practitioners are aware of the continuum which runs from gradualism to aesthetic materialism and whether they are able, in locating their practice somewhere between the two extremes, to take account of the nature of the compromise they will inevitably make. Training focuses on good practice rather than on taking a longer view of the phenomenon which locates it in its cultural context.

# Appendices

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## Appendix 1

From the preface to Gascoigne B (1962) *Twentieth Century Drama* London: Hutchinson, p. 7.

'Before embarking on a study of modern theatre one needs to clarify two much-misused terms: 'naturalism' and 'realism'. The meaning of 'naturalism' is beyond dispute - it represents a style of theatre in which the stage-setting, the dialogue of the characters and the performance of the actors seem 'life-like' - but 'realism' is often pressed into service as a synonym for it. This is confusing and wasteful. I prefer to make the distinction that naturalism is a description of style and realism of content. Naturalism reflects accurately the surface of life, whereas realism is concerned with the truth of the experience which it conveys. Thus the two are compatible but not inseparable. The alternatives to naturalism become expressionism, poetic drama, etc., and the alternatives to realism are fantasy or melodrama.'

## Appendix 2

### The Colway Theatre Trust's record 1978-1995

From the programme for *The Torbay Tempest* by Jon Oram, the 1995 community play for Torquay:

#### **'The Fifteen Year Play**

Taken that the average play has one hundred and sixty performers, over fifteen years and twenty nine plays the number of performers would be four thousand, six hundred and forty. Taking similar averages the 'Fifteen year Play' (twenty nine plays rolled into one) would have these extraordinary figures:

**A cast of 5,000 and**

60,000 helpers, makers, committee members, tea brewers, babysitters etc

150 professional workshop tutors

6,000 people attending workshops

300 professional members on the production team

600 musicians

3,500 fair traders

**and an audience of 180,000.**

**Thus involving 250,550 people.**

in 348 performances

lasting a total 45.5 days

put together over 2,730 days

with 46,400 items of costume

on 120 stages

using 3,625 lights

**at a cost of £1,297,000.**

This represents a cost of only £5.17 per person.'

### Appendix 3

From Boal A (1979) *Theatre of the Oppressed* London: Pluto Press, p.93.

'In Brecht's objection, as well as any other Marxist objection, what is at stake is who, or which term, precedes the other: the subjective or the objective. For idealist poetics, social thought conditions social being; for Marxist poetics, social being conditions social thought. In Hegel's view, the spirit creates the dramatic action; for Brecht, the character's social relations create dramatic action.

Brecht is *squarely, totally, globally opposed* to Hegel. Therefore it is a mistake to use, for designating his poetics, a term which means a *genre* in the poetics of Hegel.

Brechtian poetics is not simply "epic": it is Marxist and, being Marxist, can be lyrical, dramatic or epic. Many of his works belong to one genre, others to another, and still others to a third. Brecht's poetics embraces lyrical, as well as dramatic and epic works.'



## Appendix 4

From Goorney H. (1981) *The Theatre Workshop Story* London: Eyre Methuen, p.11.

### Manifesto of the Theatre of Action

The commercial theatre is limited by its dependence upon a small section of society which neither desires, nor dares to face the urgent problems of today. The theatre, if it is to live, must of necessity reflect the spirit of the age. This spirit is found in the social conflicts which dominate world history today - in the ranks of 3,000,000 unemployed, starving for bread, while wheat is burned for fuel.

The Theatre of Action realises that the very class which plays the chief part in contemporary history - the class upon which the prevention of war and the defeat of reaction solely depends - is debarred from expression in the present day theatre. This theatre will perform, mainly in working-class districts, plays which express the life and struggles of the workers. Politics, in its fullest sense, means the affairs of the people. In this sense, the plays done will be political. The members of the Theatre of Action are actors and actresses, producers, writers, scene-designers and other active supporters of its aims. All interested in its work are invited to become members of the Theatre of Action at a monthly subscription of 6d.

## Appendix 5

From Goorney H. (1981) *The Theatre Workshop Story* London: Eyre Methuen, p.25.

### **‘Manifesto**

The theatre must face up to the problems of its time; it cannot ignore the poverty and human suffering which increases every day. It cannot, with sincerity, close its eyes to the disasters of its time. Means Test suicides, wars, fascism and the million sordid accidents reported in the daily press. If the theatre of to-day would reach the heights achieved four thousand years ago in Greece and four hundred years ago in Elizabethan England it must face up to such problems. To those who say that such affairs are not the concern of the theatre or that the theatre should confine itself to treading in the paths of ‘beauty’ and ‘dignity’, we would say “Read Shakespeare, Marlowe, Webster, Sophocles, Aeschylus, Aristophanes, Calderon, Molière, Lope-da-Vega, Schiller and the rest.” The Theatre Union says that in facing up to the problems of our time and by intensifying our efforts to get at the essence of reality, we are also attempting to solve our own theatrical problems both technical and ideological. By doing this we are ensuring the future of the theatre, a future which will not be born in the genteel atmosphere of retirement and seclusion, but rather in the clash and turmoil of the battles between the oppressors and the oppressed.

**theatre union’**

## Appendix 6

From Goorney H. (1981) *The Theatre Workshop Story* London: Eyre Methuen, p. 41/2.

### ‘Manifesto

The great theatres of all times have been popular theatres which reflected the dreams and struggles of the people. The theatre of Aeschylus and Sophocles, of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson, of the Commedia dell’ Arte and Molière derived their inspiration, their language, their art from the people.

We want a theatre with a living language, a theatre which is not afraid of the sound of its own voice and which will comment as fearlessly on Society as did Ben Jonson and Aristophanes.

Theatre Workshop is an organisation of artists, technicians and actors who are experimenting in stage-craft. Its purpose is to create a flexible theatre-art, as swift moving and plastic as the cinema, by applying the recent technical advances in light and sound, and introducing music and the “dance-theatre” style of production.’

## Appendix 7

Extract from Jackson, Tony (1980) *Learning Through Theatre* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

'The emergence of TIE was not of course an isolated event. TIE stems from a number of distinct but related developments in theatre and in education evident throughout the twentieth century: the movements to re-establish the theatre's roots in the community and in so doing broaden its social basis - manifested since the war in the revival of regional theatre and the rapid growth of community, 'alternative' and children's theatre;<sup>1</sup> the theatre's search for a useful and effective *role* within society and an exploration especially of its potential both as an educational medium and a force for social change - seen most notably in the work of Brecht and currently in the wide spectrum of activity ranging from children's theatre to political theatre; and, in education, the recognition in recent decades of the importance of the arts (and drama particularly) in the school curriculum, together with the increasing stress now given to the *functional* role that the arts have to play in helping children to understand, and operate in, the world in which they live.'<sup>2</sup>

NB Jackson's original footnotes have been reproduced for the sake of completeness although the literature of the arts in education has now expanded to the point where a reader in the 1990's would find these two texts somewhat dated and only of general significance.

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<sup>1</sup> For a useful general account of these developments see D. Bradby and J. McCormick, *People's Theatre* (Croom Helm, 1978), though the survey oddly includes no reference to developments in young people's theatre.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of recent trends in arts education see M. Ross, *The Creative Arts* (Heinemann, 1978) and R. Witkin, *The Intelligence of Feeling* (Heinemann, 1974)

## Appendix 8

Extract from Vallins, Gordon *The beginnings of TIE* in Jackson, Tony (1980) *Learning Through Theatre* Manchester: Manchester University Press: pp9/10.

‘It was initially proposed to provide suitably qualified staff in movement and voice and a children’s theatre company, plus ancillary staff with an overall director. Their function would be to foster the scheme as a whole and to provide specialist services at each level of education. It was agreed to organise appropriate courses for teachers on creative theatre which would range from simple encouragement of the child’s own play to introducing material and information on new developments in educational drama and to encourage teachers and youth leaders to use drama techniques with their own groups. The children’s theatre company would visit schools on a regular basis and present specially-written material appropriate for each age group including such things as dramatisations of children’s stories, poetry, historical and familiar everyday events.’

## Appendix 9

### Professional Young People's Theatre Companies

- operating in May 1965

1. Arion Children's Theatre Company
2. British Dance/Drama Theatre
3. CWM Productions
4. Liverpool Everyman Theatre Company
5. Osiris Repertory Company
6. Scottish Children's Theatre
7. Southern Children's Theatre
8. Theatre Centre
9. Theatre for Youth
10. Unicorn Theatre for Children
11. Welsh Children's Theatre Company
12. Westminster Children's Theatre

Source: Arts Council of Great Britain (1967) The Report of the Young People's Theatre Enquiry London: Arts Council of Great Britain.

## Appendix 10

England (1990: 2), after SCYPT, defines the terms as follows:

### Theatre for the Young

1. Youth theatre
2. Children's theatre
3. Young people's theatre
  - 3.1 Educational theatre
  - 3.2 Theatre in education

- 
1. Youth theatre: is theatre done by young people themselves
  2. Children's Theatre: is work done by professional actors whose primary aim is to entertain children in the theatre form, or to increase their appreciation of theatre as an art form
  3. Young People's Theatre: is the umbrella heading for all work done by professional actors for young people and children with an educational purpose
    - 3.1. Educational Theatre: is theatre done by professional actors in youth clubs or similar venues. Its primary aim ... is educational but is generally restricted to *a play* for a large number of young people (up to 200)
    - 3.2 Theatre in Education: is work done by professional actor/teachers in a school context. Its primary aim is to use theatre and drama for educational purposes i.e. to teach about something other than theatre or theatre skills

Source: England, Alan (1990) *Theatre for the Young* London: Macmillan p.2.

## Appendix 11

### North West Arts TIE Companies list 1994/5

1. Action Transport
2. Rejects Revenge
3. Pit Prop
4. M6
5. Merseyside YPT
6. Focus
7. First Bite

Pit Prop ceased to trade in 1994.

Source: Airs, John (1994) *Theatre in Education: performing for you*  
 Manchester: North West Arts Board.



## Appendix 12

### A. Animateurs in post on 31.3.1984 27

England	81%
Wales	15%
Scotland	4%

Source: Glick, Ruth (1986) Dance and Mime Animateurs: an evaluation

London A.C.G.B.

### B1. Expansion of animateur posts between surveys

1985	37
1989	84
1993	262

### B2. Regional spread of animateur posts by RAB (1993)

Arts Council of England	
Eastern Arts	18.5
East Midlands Arts	13.5
West Midlands Arts	8.0
South East Arts	6.5
South West Arts	15.5
Southern Arts	26.5
North West Arts	13.0
Yorkshire and Humberside Arts	24.0
London Arts Board	

Welsh Arts Council	21.0
Scottish Arts Council	26.5

Source: Peppiatt, Anthony and Venner K (1993) Community Dance: a progress report London A.C.G.B.

## Appendix 13

### The Baldry Report

#### 8. Summary of principal recommendations

- 8.1 That a Community Arts Panel be established, which will be serviced by the Regional Department and will work in co-operation with the Regional Arts Associations
- 8.2 That an additional officer be appointed in the Regional Department so that it can deal with community arts matters
- 8.3 That the Scottish and Welsh Arts Councils be asked to consider appropriate means of supporting community arts in the light of this report
- 8.4 That £250,000, with appropriate additions for Scotland and Wales, be allocated to new expenditure on community arts in 1975/6, and that, if necessary, an approach be made to the Minister for the Arts to obtain an additional grant for this purpose.
- 8.5 That any arrangements made for the support of community arts be reviewed by the council after they have been in operation for two years.

..

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## Appendix 14

### The GLC's community arts programme

The programme sought to redress inequalities in existing cultural provision:

- it was the first large-scale attempt by an arts funding body to target social groups previously neglected by, or excluded from, the arts.<sup>1</sup> The programme funded cultural groups where members were drawn from these social groups, and encouraged all the other groups it funded to target them in their work.
- in tandem with this targeting policy the programme also laid a great stress on ensuring that groups drew up and implemented comprehensive equal opportunities policies for all areas of their operations and activities.
- funding was successfully linked to the scale of social deprivation in London's boroughs.
- arts groups were encouraged to let people democratically participate in their planning, decision-making and activities.
- arts groups were encouraged to take their activities to new venues and reach people who would not normally benefit from, or become interested in, the arts.

Source: GLC 1986:135

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<sup>1</sup>These were women, ethnic minorities, Irish, young people, gay men and lesbians, people with disabilities, the elderly. Source GLC 1986:5

## Appendix 15

### The Community Development Foundation's definitions of *community arts* and *arts in the community*:

#### 1. Community Arts

Community arts was a movement which began in the late 1960s. It aimed primarily to stimulate involvement in the arts among people in disadvantaged conditions, seeing the arts as a vehicle for expressing political and social concerns as well as creativity. It sought to empower individuals and communities to participate more effectively in running of their own lives, both by self-help groups and by intervention in public issues and policy. This conception of community arts remains strong in some cases, and notably in Scotland. In other cases 'community arts' is now used loosely for a range of activities which we would see as better included in the next category.

#### 2. Arts in the Community

Arts in the community means those arts which emanate from or are created to serve people in a particular locality or community of interest. Thus it includes both community arts and other streams of development, such as:

- independent arts initiatives by local residents;
- arts in adult education;
- outreach work by professional companies;
- the arts aspects of social and religious life;
- the arts of cultural minorities;
- initiatives by arts entrepreneurs;

arts initiatives by public authorities, including health, education, social services, prisons.

Source: CDF 1992:87

## Appendix 16

### The working process of Telford Community Arts' *No More Cream Buns* theatre workshop:

'About fifteen came to each workshop. The stimulus for the session could come from anyone, sometimes the result of general chat on the way in, sometimes purposely suggested. 'What is it that attracted you to Telford?' 'How is it that there's never any money left at the end of the week?' 'Why is it they're always having accidents at that factory?' The workshop then divided into smaller groups to produce improvised scenes based on this stimulus.

After twenty minutes or so, the small groups showed what they had been working on. In the short discussion that followed, the whole workshop queried, edited and expanded the scenes that had been presented. On a good evening, this process was repeated two or three times so that in a period of a few months, enough scenes had been built up to form the show's scenario.

Throughout this process, the workshop remained in control of the creative process, determining both the form and the content of the play. Professional theatre, music and dance artists were involved but they worked as part of the group and to the instructions of the group.

Source: Woodruff 1989:372

## **Appendix 17**

### **Questionnaire 1**

David Jones  
10 Wareing Lane  
Denton  
Northampton  
NN7 1DS

Tel: 0604 890743

Dear

### **The Coventry Community Play 1992**

I am doing a study of Community Plays and what people think about them. This study is being carried out with the agreement of the Community Department at the Belgrade Theatre. It would be very helpful to my research if you could find the time to fill in this short questionnaire.

Your answers will be confidential. Please give as much or as little information as you feel you want to and ring me on 0604 890743 if there is anything you are not sure about.

Please return the questionnaire to me in the reply-paid envelope provided as soon as you can.

Thank you for your co-operation.

David Jones

## Questionnaire 2

## The Coventry Community Play 1992

Please circle or tick where appropriate.

## Section A. PERSONAL INFORMATION

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
(leave blank if you would prefer)

2. Male:                      Female:

3. Age: Under 20	20-30	30-40
40-50	50-60	Over 60

4. Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

## Section B. YOU AND THE COMMUNITY PLAY

5. How did you hear about the Community Play ?

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6. Have you worked on a Community Play before ? Yes/No

7. Are you interested in other forms of theatre ? Yes/No

8. Are you a regular theatregoer ?

(a) Never

(c) Occasionally (d) Often

Thank you for your help with the first part of this questionnaire.

If you have a further few minutes could you complete the second page of the questionnaire?

**The Coventry Community Play 1992****Page 2**

It would be very helpful to have your thoughts on some or all of the following. Please continue over the page if you need more space.

**1. Your background:**

What has your previous experience of involvement with theatre been ?

**2. Your motivation:**

Why did you want to get involved with this community play ?

**3. The nature of your experience:**

What do you feel you are getting out of your involvement with the community play ?

**4. The final performance:**

Please predict what you think the play will be like when it is performed. Will it stand comparison with other events at the Belgrade ? How will it compare to the last community play ? By what standards will the audience judge it ?

Would you object to a further contact from me ? Yes/No

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

David Jones



## **Questions for taped interviews**

### **The First Interview**

The first interview was designed to examine the participants' feelings, hopes and aspirations for the community play. It focused, in particular, on the level of participation and democracy experienced by the participants - the 'ownership' of the project. The small sample were asked the following questions:-

### **DEMOCRACY/PARTICIPATION**

1. Can you tell me something about how decisions are made in the community play ?

Supplementaries;

1.1 Are you consulted ?

1.2 Do you feel that the play is 'yours' or the Belgrade's ?

### **PERCEPTIONS/IMAGES OF COMMUNITY**

2. This is a 'community' play. Who do you think are 'the community'?

### **PREDICTIONS**

3. The questionnaire asked you to say very briefly what you think the play will be like and you said....

Now the play is cast and in rehearsal can you expand on that a little?

## Appendix 18

### The Coventry Community Play 1992 Aims and Objectives

1. To set up a Community Play Steering Group to organise the 1992 project that is made up of local people working in partnership with the Belgrade Theatre.
2. To utilise the skills and knowledge of professional people where necessary and to ensure we learn as much as possible.
3. To produce a play for the people of Coventry that will give us a fresh experience and reinforce the sense of fulfilment we all felt in the first community play.
4. To share people's experiences and the extraordinariness of those experiences and to shape them into a dramatic form.
5. To explore in more depth the process of writing and creating the play. To start with nothing and create something. To truly represent the views and ideas of people as well as creating a play that is dramatic and exciting.
6. To help take the 'mystery' out of theatre but keep its excitement and challenge and make it into something that anyone can get involved in, particularly people who have had little access to the theatre.
7. To adopt the theatre's Equal Opportunities Policy.
8. To explore more interesting and challenging ways of designing and staging community plays.
9. To achieve as high an artistic standard as possible.
10. To find new sources of funding for the project.
11. To find better ways of marketing the play.
12. To make the process a sociable experience.
13. To provide a better understanding of community plays.
14. To work with people of all ages.

JLH

1 April 1992

## Appendix 19

### Questionnaire statistics

Number issued	185
Number returned	49
Response rate	26.5%

Notes:

Of those returned

- (i) 4 were from people who had withdrawn from the project
- (ii) 1 contained all the information relating to a family of three. This the usable sample was 47 or 25.4%

### **Statistical data from the usable sample of 47**

#### 1. Classification by gender:

Female 57.4% Male 42.6%

#### 2. Classification by age:

Under 20	29.8%
20-30	23.4%
30-40	10.6%
40-50	14.9%
50-60	12.8%
Over 60	8.5%

#### 3. Classification by previous community play experience:

With experience	40.4%
Without experience	59.6%

#### 4. Classification by attendance at performance:

Never attend	2.1%
Rarely attend	17.0%
Occasionally attend	66.0%
Often attend	14.9%

## Appendix 20

### Further detail relating to the management of the questionnaire

Making a group of 6-8 represent a sample of 47 proved difficult but I identified 7 respondents as the interview group having constructed the following guidelines. The group should contain more women than men, 50% of the group should be under 40 and there should be at least 1 member of the Steering Group. Applying these guidelines to the information in the table and using the R/A ratings to aid choice I removed respondent 9 because of his uncertainty about being interviewed and respondents 1,2, &3 because of their low R/A rating. This left 8 respondents, most of whom were members of the Steering Group, evenly split between men and women so, wishing to reduce the number of men in line with the guidelines, I then looked again at all the men and removed respondent 8 whose R/A rating was the lowest. I subsequently approached the 7 respondents numbered 4,5,6,7,8,10,11 and 12 to be interviewed and conducted six interviews before, during or after rehearsal sessions in July 1992.

I was at pains to make the process as informal as possible and although each respondent in the interview group was a volunteer it became clear that conducting the interviews would not be unproblematic. It is possible that some of the group had not fully understood what being part of the group would involve. It is also possible that unhappy memories of the monitoring and evaluation process from In Search Of Cofa's Tree had been revived. Faced with tape-recorder and notebook respondent 7 felt unable to be interviewed. I therefore approached respondent 8 who felt that he did not now wish to commit the extra time to being part of the group. I made appointments with the remaining group of 6 (respondents 4,5,6,10,11 & 12) to carry out the second interview during production week but the extra pressure of the performance meant that only respondents 5, 10 and 12 were able to give their time. Respondents 4, 6 and 11 did not want to be interviewed again. This meant that instead of having fourteen interviews recorded by the performance

week I had only nine and I had lost another three of the interview group. I concluded the interviews approximately one month later by interviewing again respondents 5, 10 and 12. This left me with a total of twelve interviews but with continuity across the whole process represented by only three respondents - numbers 5, 10 and 12. It was plain that the interview group had become self-selecting and I was left with information from two men and one woman all of whom were members of the Steering Group. However, the level of debate which these three were prepared to engage in was high. They had plainly been thinking deeply about what Kershaw calls 'the transaction of ideological business' (Kershaw 1992:29). After my initial concern that the whole group was going to disintegrate, the interviews had been relatively easy to conduct with each member of the group giving clear answers and showing evidence of having thought about the areas of questioning between the interviews.

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